STUDIES IN POETS

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

JOHN DRYDEN

Absalom and Achitophel

RAMJI LALL

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NEW DELHI-5

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JOHN DRYDEN

ABSALOM AND ACHITOPHEL

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Absalom And Achitophel

[*Edited with a Critical Introduction, Notes and Explanations, Questions and Answers*]

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PREFACE TO THE SIXTH EDITION

It is always a pleasure for the publishers to bring out a new edition of any of their publications because the continued demand for a book is the only proof in their eyes that the author had taken pains upon the writing of it. And, to tell the truth, the author too feels immensely pleased in such a situation.

The present critical study of Dryden's great satirical work has certainly served the purpose for which it was designed. Hundreds of advanced students of English Literature have benefited by it, and it has enabled them to tackle examination questions most satisfactorily. It is hoped that this book will continue to prove as helpful to students in future as it has done in the past.

New Delhi
November, 1983

RAMJI LALL

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

Absalom And Achitophel is the greatest political satire in the English language. This book contains not only the text of the poem, but also an exhaustive critical treatment of it. Every aspect of this poem has thoroughly been discussed. In fact nothing relevant to the proper appreciation of the poem or the examination needs of university students has been left out. A complete paraphrase of the text and detailed explanations have also been provided. Important questions with complete answers are another feature of the book. It is hoped that university students will greatly benefit by this book.

I would like to repeat here what I have said about each of my other books : "No originality is claimed for this work. It is not a research paper. The object was to select and co-ordinate available critical material and to present it with suitable illustrations from the text, in an easily intelligible and assimilable forms."

New Delhi
August, 1973

RAMJI LALL

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(1) (*a*) "The supreme excellence of *Absalom and Achitophel* lies in its sketches of character." Discuss.

Or

Discuss the art of characterisation in *Absalom and Achitophel.*

Or

Comment on Dryden's art of characterisation, illustrating your answer from the First Part of *Absalom and Achitophel*

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(b) "We have from Dryden magnificent portraits of his opponents, sketched with a large geniality even in the condemnation," To what extent is this true of *Absalom And Achitophel* ? ... 168

(2) Comment on Dryden's use of the Bible in *Absalom And Achitophel.* ... 175

(3) Comment on Dryden's use of history in *Absalom And Achitophel.*

Or

Would you regard *Absalom And Achitophel* as a reliable mirror to the period with which it deals ? ... 178

(4) "The pamphleteer in Dryden never gets the better of the artist". Discuss this with reference to *Absalom And Achitophel* (Part I).

Or

"In a political satire such as *Absalom And Achitophel*, there would have been for any other writer a danger of its becoming a mere party pamphlet but Dryden, when his imagination is fired, shows the true poetic faculty." Discuss.

Or

"To regard Dryden as pre-eminently a satirist is to ignore the fact that he was a poet." Discuss.

Or

"*Absalom And Achitophel* is only a political satire." Do you agree ? Give reasons for your answer. ... 183

(5) *Absalom And Achitophel* is organised around a contrast between two ways of life. Extravagance, restlessness, ambition, pride, and intolerance are contrasted with moderation, order, tolerance, patience, and humility." Elaborate this statement through an analysis of the text. ... 187

(6) "I have but laughed at some men's follies, when I could have declaimed against their vices, and other men's virtues I have commended as freely as I have taxed their crimes." Consider the characters in *Absalom And Achitophel* in the light of this claim made by Dryden.

Or

"Dryden's wit is essentially good-humoured. This is both its weakness and strength." How far do you agree ? Discuss with reference to *Absalom And Achitophel.*

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Or

Is "the amendment of vices by correction" the essence of satire? How far is this true of *Absalom And Achitophel* ?

Or

Write a note on Dryden as a satirist in the light of his poem, *Absalom And Achitophel*. (Or, Discuss *Absalom And Achitophel* as a satire.) ... 190

(7) "The men Dryden deals with are always men persons we can recognise today in our own experience, and the hatred he expresses rises obviously from enthusiasm for what is noble and right, and not from personal malice." Do you agree ? Discuss with reference to *Absalom And Achitophel*. ... 195

(8) Is it true that in *Absalom And Achitophel* Dryden raised political satire from its usual plane of coarseness to epical grandeur ? Elucidate.

Or

"*Absalom And Achitophel* is a little epic, containing also humorous and satiric elements." Discuss.

Or

"What gives *Absalom and Achitophel* its characteris tic tone is the blending with a heroic basis of a strong element of wit." Discuss this statement.

Or

"No satire in English is at once so weighty, and gives such an impression of the satirist's superiority to his victims." Examine this observation in regard to Dryden's *Absalom And Achitophel*. ... 199

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1

John Dryden—His Life, His Poetic Works, and His Rank as a Poet

I. A SHORT BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

John Dryden was born in the little village of Aldwinkle, Northamptonshire, in 1631. His father was the village rector. Both his parents had strong Puritan tendencies. By the age of ten, Dryden had read an English translation of the works of the Greek historian Polybius. He was sent to the famous Westminster School, then under the famous headmastership of Dr. Busby. Here Dryden was able to appreciate and benefit by the excellent classical education he received. The benefit of that education is continually in evidence throughout his literary work. At Westminster School he made his first attempt at poetry by writing an elegy to the memory of his schoolfellow, Lord Hastings, and he translated the third satire of Perseus as part of his school task.

In 1655 he went to Trinity College, Cambridge. He was keenly interested in reading and became one of the best-educated men of his age. At Cambridge he also wrote some insignificant poetry. On leaving Cambridge in 1657, he went to London as Secretary to Sir Gilbert Pickering (a kinsman of his mother's) and chamberlain to Oliver Cromwell, the Lord Protector. Being allied to the Puritan party, he wrote some verses on the death of Cromwell in 1659. These verses, which he called *Heroic Stanzas,* made him well-known and he seemed to have emerged as the new poet of Puritanism. The Restoration brought about a complete change in him. He put himself promptly on the winning side and wrote *Astrae Redux,* a poem of welcome to Charles II, followed by the *Panegyric to His Sacred Majesty.* In 1664, he married Lady Elizabeth Howard, daughter of the Earl of Berkshire. The marriage brought him a hundred pounds a year, but little happiness.

From 1663-1681, Dryden chiefly wrote plays. He knew he had no genius for drama but it was the most profitable branch of literature at that time and he experimented upon it, not always with success. About twenty plays came from his pen, all more or less coarse. The stage demanded vulgar stuff, and he satisfied the taste of his audi-

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ences. "I confess", he said, "my chief endeavours are to delight the age in which I live." I know I am not so fitted by nature to write comedy. Reputation in them is the last thing which I shall pretend. His first effort, *The Wild Gallant* (1663), was a failure. *The Rival Ladies* (1664) was, however, a success. *The Indian Emperor* (1667) established his reputation as a play-wright.

In 1665, while plague was raging in London, Dryden retired to his father-in-law's house at Charlton with his wife. Here he wrote his first great poem, *Annus Mirabilis* (1667). It was written in quatrains or stanzas of four lines in alternate rhyme. This poem, dealing with the horrors of the Great Fire in London and with some events of the war with Holland, made him really famous. Two years later appeared his *Essay on Dramatic Poesy*, a prose work written in the form of a dialogue. In 1670, the first political recognition of his work came to him when he was asked to accept the appointments of Poet-Laureate and Historiographer Royal, with their accompanying pensions of two hundred pounds a year. This placed Dryden in prosperous circumstances, because he was already making considerable profits from his literary work and from his share in one of the theatres. Official recognition and good financial returns made some of the contemporary literary men jealous of Dryden. The following year, some of his rivals, including the Duke of Buckingham, produced *The Rehearsal*, in which they made fun of Dryden. Dryden took no notice of this attack at the time but later, when the Earl of Shaftesbury was plotting to secure the succession of the Duke of Monmouth, Dryden took advantage of the political conflict between Shaftesbury and King Charles II, and wrote his brilliant satire *Absalom and Achitophel*, in which Shaftesbury, Monmouth, and Buckingham were all attacked. Dryden had taken his revenge. In 1682, Dryden wrote *The Medal*, another brilliant piece of satirical work. This was followed by *MacFlecknoe*, satirising Shadwell who was the principal poet of the Whig party and who had attacked Dryden in a poem called *The Medal of John Bayes*.

In 1686, Dryden became a Roman Catholic, whether from an inner conviction, or time-serving motives, it is difficult to say. The change in his religion inspired his next poetic work: *The Hind and the Panther, A Defence of the Roman Church* (1687). This work certainly brought some fame to the poet but no financial gain. The following year, when William and Mary ascended the throne, and Protestantism was in high favour, Dryden fell on evil days. The pensions accompanying his public appointments were withdrawn. Worst of all, he suffered the humiliation of seeing his rival appointed to the Laureateship that he had held for eighteen years. As an old man, he was thrown back on literature as his only means of livelihood. He went to work with extraordinary courage and energy, writing plays, poems,etc. His most successful works at this time were his translations of classical writers like Juvenal, Perseus, and Virgil.

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The Fables, his last work consisting of a collection adapted from the works of Chaucer and Boccaccio, was published in 1700. During these last years Dryden lived in London. The coffee- house of that day was the chief place of resort for literary men. At Will's coffee-house or at Button's the wits gathered for exchange of compliments or for verbal warfare; there their admirers or patrons met them, and from there originated the criticism or appreciation that marred or made the fortunes of rising young authors. Dryden was a habitual frequenter of Will's coffee-house, and there he was as much a monarch as Ben Jonson had been at the Mermaid's or as Samuel Johnson was to be at meetings of the Literary Club.

Dryden died in 1700, the year of the publication of his *Fables,* and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

II. PRINCIPAL POETIC WORKS OF DRYDEN

Political and personal. *Heroic Stanzas* (1659)—written in praise of Cromwell.

Astrae Redux (1660)—written to welcome Charles II to the English throne.

To the Lady Castlemain(1663)—a poem of gallantry.

Annus Mirabilis (1667)—treating primarily of two events of the wonderful year of 1666: the English naval victory over the Dutch fleet, and the horrors of the Great Fire in London.

To the Memory of Mr. Oldham (1684).

Threnodia Auguslalis (1685)—written in praise of Charles II.

Britannia Rediviva (1688)—written in honour of the birth of James II's heir.

Satiric. *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681)—allegorical satire in heroic couplets on the Whig attempt of the Earl of Shaftesbury to set up the Duke of Monmouth, a Protestant, in place of the Duke of York, a Roman Catholic, as the successor of Charles II. This is regarded as the greatest political verse satire in English.

The Medal (1682)—a satire against sedition.

MacFlecknoe (1682)—a bitterly satirical poem attacking Thomas Shadwell.

Religio Laici (1682)—the religion of a layman. Dryden here argues for the credibility of the Christian religion and against Deism, and (perhaps with less conviction) for the Anglican Church against that of Rome.

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The Hind and the Panther (1687)—defending the Roman Catholic Church as against the Church of England which Dryden had championed in *Religio Laici.*

Odes. *To the Pious Memory of Mrs. Anne Killigrew (1686).*

A Song For St. Cecilia's Day (1687).

Alexander's Feast or the Power of Music (1697).

III. DRYDEN AS A POET—AN ESTIMATE

Dryden is the greatest literary figure of the Restoration. "Every age has a kind of universal genius", wrote Dryden in his *Essay on Dramatic Poesy*, and these words are truer of him than of any other writer in any other age. Dryden stands between two very different ages —the age of Milton and the age of Pope, and he serves as a transition from one to the other. The change from the romantic to the classical manner was already in evidence before Dryden, but in his work this trend is fully established. He is thus a harbinger or forerunner of the eighteenth century neo-classical poetry.

There are many more inspired writers than Dryden, but there appears no English writer who succeeded so well in so many different branches of writing. In verse satire, he is unsurpassed. As a master of metre, he compares favourably with all English poets, except the greatest. As a writer of odes, he stands very high. As a translator, he is good though by no means perfect. Above all, he is a master-craftsman. Dryden understood the possibilities of the heroic couplet and did brilliant things with it. Never before had the heroic couplet been used with such telling effect as in his *Absalom and Achitophel*, the versification of which is remarkable. Dryden established the heroic couplet as the fashion for satiric, didactic, and descriptvie poetry. This had a great influence on the succeeding age of neo-classicism.

Dryden predominated over his age as much as Pope, Johnson, or Tennyson predominated over theirs, and held the position of a literary dictator, T. S. Eliot has paid a glowing tribute to Dryden, while Bonamy Dobree has gone so far as to say that, while Milton injured English poetry, Dryden conferred great benefits upon it.

As a lyric poet, his fame rests on his three odes. These are ingenious and skilful poems but, as compared with the great lyric writers of the Elizabethan age, Dryden must occupy a modest place in the second rank. His lyric poems do not have the passion, the depth of feeling, the fire, the ardour of romantic lyrical poetry. Nor do they have the personal character of romantic lyrics.

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Drydens' literary life falls into three distinct periods. The first, ending with 1681, is mainly the period of drama. Dryden disciplined himself into writing dramas because they were a paying proposition. But his real genius lay in other directions. The second period from 1681 to the Revolution, saw the publication of all his greatest works. The third, from 1689 to his death, was the period of miscellaneous production—fables, translations, elegies, writing to order for the book-sellers. Of his dramas, among the most important are his heroic plays of which the best are *The Indian Emperor* and *The Conquest of Granada.* These are sensational tragedies in heroic couplets, full of rant and fustian; the scene always laid abroad, the characters all kings and queens, great generals and fabulously lovely ladies, but they served to develop and perfect his powers of versification in the couplet in preparation for the great satires. In non-dramatic poetry, *Annus Mirabilis* celebrates, in the heroic quatrain, the year of the Fire of London; *Religio Laici* is a reasoned confession of faith; *The Hind and the Panther* is a controversial defence of his newly-adopted Roman Catholicism; *Alexander's Feast* is a magnificent ode written for St. Cecilia's Day; *The Fables* are mainly paraphrases and modernisations of Boccaccio and Chaucer; the *Translation of Virgil* is a more faithful and spirited piece of work than Pope's *Homer.* Of these, only the *Religio Laici* and *The Hind and the Panther* may claim to be masterpieces.

But three pieces not named above, *Absalom and Achitophel, The Medal,* and *MacFlecknoe,* all produced within the space of 12 months (1681-2), are indisputably the masterpieces of English satire. Dryden is the greatest reasoner in English verse. But when he combines reasoning with satire, he produces work which has infinitely greater precision and finish than would have been possible in prose. Nowhere else is the easy wing-stroke of the couplet, at once propelling the poet through the upper air and slapping his victim in the face at every beat, so triumphantly and coolly manifested.

As a poet, Dryden ripened very slowly. His first poem, an elegy on the death of young Lord Hastings, written at 18 is extremely bad; his *Heroic Stanzas,* written at 27, though they contain a few fine lines and images, are crude and bombastic. For the time being he was greatly influenced by Cowley, whom he afterwards described as "the darling of my youth", and as a result, all the characteristic absurdities of the metaphysical school abound in these early works. They survive even in *Annus Mirabilis* (1667), in which, writing of the two great events of the "wonderful year"—the war with Holland and the Fire of London—he indulges from time to time in almost fantastic conceits; as when, for example, he depicts the Deity extinguishing the conflagration with a "hollow crystal pyramid", precisely in the way in which he himself was accustomed to put out his own candle. But though its faults are numerous and glaring, the masculine vigour and lucidity of the poem reveal an immense development in the writer's genius. For the full expression of his powers, however, we

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have to turn to the work of the last twenty years of his life, in which he sheds the false taste of the metaphysical writers, and his style, no longer turbid and choked with all sorts of rubbish, flows clear and strong. This work, which marks the definite establishment of the classical school of poetry in England, may be classified under three heads:

(1) **The political satires :** *Absalom and Achitophel*, written amid the excitement following he alleged Popish Plot to defend the king's policy against the Earl of Shaftesbury, and specially famous for its powerful character-studies, as of Shaftesbury himself under the name of Achitophel, and of the Duke of Buckingham under Zimri; *The Medal* a further invective against Shaftesbury; and *Mac Flecknoe*, a scathing personal attack on a former friend, Thomas Shadwell, who had replied to *The Medal* in a poem filled with scurrilous abuse.

(2) The two great doctrinal poems, *Religio Laici* and *The Hind and the Panther*. These are not in the strict sense religious; there is nothing devotional or spiritual about them. They are theological and controversial; and, written as they are from two opposed points of view, they are curiously interesting as showing Dryden's mastery in the art of argumentation in verse, and his extraordinary skill in supporting whatever position he might for the moment adopt. His mental flexibility and agility gave him remarkable power as a special pleader.

(3) **The Fables :** These fine tales, written amid the anxieties of Dryden's last years and under the increasing burden of age and ill-health, do not show any flagging of energy; they rather show the poet almost at his best, and give him a title to rank among the best story-tellers in English verse. The *Palamon and Arcite,* based upon *The Knight's Tale* of Chaucer illustrates the difference between the method and art of the fourteenth-century poet, and those of the seventeenth-century poet.

Dryden's poetry, alike in its limitations and in its merits, is thoroughly representative of the age. As a whole, it is marked by a general want of what are regarded as the essential poetic qualities. It has little imaginative power, little depth of feeling, little spiritual glow or fervour; and except here and there, as in the two remarkable odes to *The Memory of Mrs. Anne Killigrew* and *Alexander's Feast*, it rarely touches a high lyrical note. On the other hand, it is characterised by splendid intellectuality and a manly vigour of style. If Dryden is seldom poetic (using the word in the sense which we attach to it when we are thinking of writers like Coleridge or Keats), he at least gives us many passages of wonderful strength and eloquence. It is, therefore, easy to see why he holds his own as a satirist and as a reasoner in verse. In both these fields, the author of *Absalom and Achitophel* and *Religio Laici* is still the greatest master in English poetry.

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It is not easy to arrive at a sound estimate of Dryden's poetry. To nineteenth century critics, it seemed to lack elevation. In the first place, the material of much of it is borrowed from other writers. But we must remember that in his long labours of translation and adaptation, Dryden was fulfilling the requirements of his age. The time was not one of creation, but of criticism; one of steady assimilation of what earlier ages had produced. In the second place, the subject-matter of his original poetry, the affairs of church and state, is remote from what is generally regarded as poetic. But here again Dryden was responding to the demands of his age.

As regards the form, few major poets have maintained such strict uniformity as Dryden did. With the exception of the lyrics in his dramas, several odes, two early poems in the heroic stanza, and the blank verse of *All For Love*, Dryden cultivated steadily the heroic couplet. The heroic couplet appealed with irresistible force to an age weary of the conceits of the metaphysical poets, and desiring, above all, uniformity, precision, and regularity. It was, moreover, a vehicle strikingly adapted to the conveyance of the literary baggage of the time. When at the close of *Religio Laici* Dryden says,

> And this unpolished rugged verse I chose
> As fittest for discourse, and nearest prose,

his second line may be taken as referring to his poems in general. In them we look for the virtues of prose rather than for those of poetry, for the utilitarian qualities, neatness, clearness, energy, rather than for imaginative suggestion; we look for epigram in place of metaphor, for boldly-marked rhythm instead of elusive harmony.

Although in the great body of his work Dryden kept to the couplet form, his odes, and the songs that are scattered in his dramas, show that he possessed power over a variety of metres. The two odes (*St. Cecilia's Day,* and especially the second, called *Alexander's Feast*) illustrate his skill in making his lines march to the measure of his thought. It is true that even in his lyrics Dryden's charm is rather one of line and general movement than of phrase or word. He has little of the magic and glamour that belong to poets of deeper, though perhaps less ample, inspiration.

Though he wrote few direct satires (he translated several), a strong vein of satirical comment runs through the body of his verse, and indeed flickers intermittently in his plays. But apart from what he may have been writing about, his verse is always characteristic, moulded partly by what he thought a poet ought to be, and what he should accomplish. As to the former, he stated—to quote one of his passages on this theme: "Mere poets and mere musicians are as sottish as mere drunkards are, who live in a continual mist,

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without seeing or judging anything clearly. A man should be learned in several sciences, and should have a reasonable, philosophic and, in some measure, a mathematical head, to be a complete and excellent poet: and, besides this, should have experience in all sorts of humours and manners of men, should be thoroughly skilled in conversation, and should have a great knowledge of mankind in general." In another place, he says that he thinks little of a poet who cannot argue well. His poetry, then, deals with what is common experience, not, of course, omitting spiritual experience. There is, then, in his poetry, none of the yearning of the Romantics, the reachings out after the impalpable in the attempt to grasp the inapprehensible: his vivid, actual imagination plays around the actions and passions of men and women as they live out their lives, in soul as well as in body. He does not confront us with profound, searching sentiment making us face the innermost nature of our being; but he has a firm grasp over a wide field, handling at no despicable level the eternal religious issues, and the scientific development of his age.

When he is compared with Pope, he will be found to be much nearer of the two to the ideal satirist as defined by Dryden. Rich, massive, intensely vigorous and virile is Dryden. The red-hot energy which ensures a liquid ease of expression and gives warmth and life to all the satirical portraits; their inimitable precision which, though not so minutely exact as Pope's, has a range of application far beyond his, and an ease and freedom peculiar to themselves; the clear reasoning so convincing to the reader, perhaps all the more because it requires so little effort to follow; the utter absence of any cold timidity or drowsy hesitation of expression—these are the great qualities of Dryden's best poetry.

Dryden received glowing tributes of admiration from his contemporaries. Pope, for instance, declared that he learned versification wholly from Dryden's works, Dryden, who

> taught to join
> The varying verse, the full-resounding line,
> The long majestic march, and energy divine.

It was Dryden's influence and example which lifted the classic couplet into the place it was to occupy for many years as the accepted measure of serious English poetry. When he began to write, he, like the literary world in general, was in a state of uncertainty in regard to the best form to adopt. By his splendid use of it, he proved its capabilities and assured its success. The most striking way in which English poetry reflected the spirit of the new era (the seventeenth century) was in its substitution of a single perfect form for the metrical variety of Elizabethan poetry. This form, the heroic couplet, consisted of two lines of rhyming pentameters. It had been used in earlier periods, for example, by Chaucer; but in

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his hands the couplet had not been necessarily a unit since the thought had often been carried over in the succeeding pair of verses, with no pause at the rhyming word. And in the romantic period which followed the eighteenth century, the couplet was once more used with the old freedom. The metrical ideals of the Restoration, as contrasted with those of the romantic school, may be illustrated by the comparison of a few lines from Keats, such as these from the beginning of *Endymion :*

A thing of beauty is a joy forever :
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing;

with these from *The Hind and the Panther* of Dryden :

A milk-white hind, immortal and unchanged,
Fed on the lawns, and in the forest rang'd;
Without unspotted, innocent within,
She fear'd no danger for she knew no sin.

In the first, it is clear, the couplet exerts little control over the thought; in the second, the thought is limited and regulated by the acceptance of a precise and narrow form; and this limitation and regulation were of the essence of Restoration poetry. Among the first writers to use the closed couplet consistently was Edmund Waller (1606-1687). As early as 1625, he set the steady, measured pace which succeeding poets were to follow with military precision for more than a century. His influence, however, became predominant only through the extraordinary energy and success of his follower, the greatest literary figure of the age of Charles II, John Dryden.

"His diction is in tune with his ideas; he disciplines himself to use the precise word rather than the word with a vague aura of association, endeavouring always to express as clearly and firmly as possible what he means to say. In a way, moreover, that is pleasantly acceptable. 'Would not Donne's *Satires,* which abound with so much wit, appear more charming, if he had taken care of his words, and of his numbers ?' For the musician in the poet was not to be ignored, as he might have seemed to suggest in the passage quoted above. For 'by the harmony of words we elevate the mind to a sense of devotion, as our solemn music, which is inarticulate poesy, does in churches.' Here, of course, is the eternal question of pleasure and profit, of the aesthetic as against the moral. 'Delight', he said in the *Defence of an Essay of the Dramatic Poesy* (1668), 'is the chief, if not the only, end of poesy: instruction can be admitted but in the second place, for poesy only instructs as it delights'; though a few pages later he says that poetry must 'resemble natural truth, but it must be ethical.' He

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sums up his attitude best in his *Discourse on Satire* (1693): 'They, who will not grant me that pleasure is one of the ends of poetry, but that it is only a means of compassing the only end, which is instruction, must yet allow that, without the means of pleasure, the instruction is but a bare and dry philosophy: a crude preparation of morals, which we may have from Aristotle or Epictetus, with more profit than from any poet.' But words, he held, were only the colouring of the poem-picture; what was important was the idea, and the structure, though the colouring was what first struck the eye. So whatever words he uses, his is still the language that might be spoken by men to men. It is never, pejoratively speaking,* 'poetic'. That is one of his great triumphs. Even in his most grandiose odes he keeps his colloquial phrasing : there is no tortuousness, none of the 'nagging after-effect' of the Metaphysicals."

"In thinking of Dryden, it is a sense of over-all greatness that remains; he is the superb all-round man. His influence has been enormous, but this is always a difficult matter to assess. It does, however, seem to be undoubted that he made the Ode live on as an English form, which he made shapely rather than formalised. It is certain that his St. Cecilia ode, the Anne Killigrew ode, and perhaps others, prepared the ground for the odes of Collins and Gray, and made possible Wordsworth's *Immortality Ode* and the *Ode to Duty*. By his example he sustained the variety of the lyric, and without him eighteenth century poetry would have been very different from what it is. It may be noted further that poets have turned to him in their distress, as Keats began to do when he found that Milton failed him. Craftsmen in poetry—that is to say, good poets—even now are not slow to salute him."

At the end of his life, Dryden described himself as one "who had done his best to improve the language, and especially the poetry", of his country. To a considerable extent he was justified in saying this : for even putting aside his really great activities in English prose, he had clarified and freshened English verse, brushing away much of the picturesque yet confusing tangle of ornamental undergrowth, and giving it point and actuality.

"His dramatic verse at its best is eloquent and spirited; his non-dramatic verse extraordinarily varied. If not achieving special excellence in his lyrics or his narrative verse, he is rarely banal, always easy and dexterous, whilst in didactic verse he is a master. He raised it from an indifferent form of workmanship into the front rank, and whether in long flights as in *Absalom and Achitophel*, or in the shorter flights, illustrated in his Prologues, Epilogues, and Fables, he is amazingly alive and original. The term "original" as applied to Dryden needs this qualification. In the sense in which it is applied to the creative shapings of high imagination, Dryden

* ***pejoratively speaking***—speaking in a depreciatory sense.

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was not original. In other words, originality of *conception* is not his. But in the matter of *treatment*, he is uniformly original. He invented nothing, but the crude inventions of other men he perfected, and what he said of his countrymen might well be applied to himself : 'The genius of our countrymen is rather to improve an invention than to invent themselves.' "

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Lucilius
Horace
Persius
Juvenal

2

The Meaning and Origin of Satire

The term "satire" is difficult to define, because the genre is extremely flexible. There is a surprising variety in the form (in both verse and prose) and in the intention of the writer. Invective, offensive vituperation, didactic instruction, corrective ridicule, personal abuse, pessimistic generalisations, mild scorn, amused raillery, genial or sharp parody, slapstick homour, gross vulgarity, ironic wit—all these and several other features are to be found in different satirical works. "The true end of satire is the amendment of vices by correction", says Dryden. There is a general agreement that satire is a "criticism of life", and that it destroys by ridicule and, implicitly, upholds certain moral values. But the variety of subject and style in the field of satire is amazing.

A satire is a medley or, as Dryden said, a hotch-potch. This literary form was invented by the Romans—by Lucilius (who flourished 180-102 B.C.). Lucilius was followed by Horace (65-8 B.C.), Persius (A.D. 34-61), and Juvenal (about A.D. 55-130). The Roman style of satire arrived late in England. Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-42) wrote against court life. John Donne wrote three satires in 1593 and Joseph Hall published *Virgidemiarum* in six books, three in 1597 being "toothless satires" based on Horace and Persius, and three in 1598 being "biting satires" in the style of Juvenal. In 1598, John Marston published his bitter attack on Joseph Hall and others, and called it a *Scourge Of Villainy*. But in June 1599, the Archbishop of Canterbury made an order that "no satires or epigrams be printed here-after."*

Whatever hints about the writing of satire Dryden took from his contemporaries, such as John Hall, John Cleveland, Andrew Marvell, Edmund Waller, or John Oldham, it is obvious that he had read the major Roman satirists. In fact, in his later years, he translated some of the Latin satires into English. And so, for good or bad, English satire once more modelled itself upon Horace, Persius, and Juvenal. When Dr. Johnson wanted to describe

* The writing of satires is not an entirely safe pursuit. Some Roman satirists suffered exile. Dryden received a beating from hired ruffians in 1679. Voltaire was similarly treated in 1725. Although Dryden attacked Shadwell, Shaftesbury, Papists and Fanatics, he paradoxically objected to Whigs meeting in coffee-houses in order to indulge in witty abuse of the government.

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Dryden's general position in the field of poetry, he said: "He found it brick and he left it marble." It has been perhaps too readily assumed that Dryden and Pope likewise perfected the Roman satire which they found and left it Augustan marble. But this assumption is not strictly correct. All the Roman verse-satirists wrote in a bold, free-running hexameter, which has a range unequalled by that of any other metre except perhaps English blank verse at its fullest development. They could make it do almost everything from comical conversation to sustained and lofty declamation. On the contrary, Dryden and Pope wrote in the stopped couplet—a metre capable of great delicacy and wit, but quite unable to attain a wide range of emotion, or a copious variety of effects. Compared with their classical models, they were severely limited. Not only did they over-indulge in antitheses, but they "thought in couplets, and rode Pegasus on the snaffle."* Besides, Dryden was somewhat influenced by the forces of genteel respectability, so that colourful slangy talk, eccentric vocabulary, or coarse abuse were replaced by polite sarcasms or abstract terms. (Pope was influenced by those forces to an even greater extent). The verbal tricks of *Hudibras*, which Dryden disapproved, were similar to some of the devices of the Roman satirists, and in refining his language and adopting the heroic couplet, Dryden had also to say farewell to the huge variety of Latin satire. Thus we have to revise radically the usual view that Roman satire brought clarity and discipline to English satire, enabling Dryden, Pope and Johnson to produce English marble from English brick. The fact is that these writers took the wonderful Roman hotch-potch and reduced it severely to the limited couplet satire that we know.

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"The true end of Satire is the amendment of vices by Corrections."

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* *on the snaffle*—gently.

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3

Dryden As A Satirist

In an interesting passage of his *Essay On Satire,* Dryden gives us his own recipe : "How easy it is to call rogue and villain, and that wittily. But how hard to make a man appear a fool, a blockhead, or a knave, without using any of those opprobrious terms ! This is the mystery of that noble trade. Neither is it true that this fineness of raillery is offensive : a witty man is tickled while he is hurt in this manner, and a fool feels it not. There is a vast difference betwixt the slovenly butchering of a man and the fineness of a stroke that separates the head from the body and leaves it standing in its place. A man may be capable, as Jack Ketch's wife said of his servant, of a plain piece of work, of a bare hanging; but to make a malefactor die sweetly was only belonging to her husband. I wish I could apply it to myself, if the reader would be kind enough to think it belongs to me. The character of Zimri in my *Absalom* is, in my opinion, worth the whole poem. It is not bloody, but, it is ridiculous enough, and he for whom it was intended was too witty to resent it as an injury. I avoided the mention of great crimes, and applied myself to the representing of blind-sides and little extravagances, to which, the wittier a man is, he is generally the more obnoxious."

Absalom and Achitophel begins a new chapter in the history of English classical satire. Satire had passed successively through the hands of Gascoigne, Donne, Lodge, Hall, Marston, Wither, Cleveland, Marvell, and Oldham; but it had never attained an excellence comparable to what it attained here. Dryden's poem raised English satire to the level of that superb satirical literature which Quintilian claimed as the peculiar and exclusive product of the Roman genius. Not only did it furnish Pope, and the school of Pope as well as others (as, for instance, Byron) with models, but it exhibited for the first time the power, plasticity, and compass of the heroic couplet in departments of poetry where it was to achieve its greatest triumphs. The plan of the poem is perhaps not original. The idea of casting satire in the epic mould, which is an important feature of the work, was suggested no doubt by the Fourth Satire of Juvenal. Horace and Lucan undoubtedly supplied models for the elaborate portraits, and Lucan's description of the political condition of Rome at the time of the great civil conflict is, unmistakably, Dryden's archetype for his picture of the state of parties

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in London. Nor was the ingenious device of disguising living persons and current incidents under the veil of Scriptural names new to Dryden's readers. This poem is the triumph of genius as distinguished from mere talent, for the verdict of those whom it delighted when it was published has been corroborated by the judgment of those who no longer feel interested in the local and ephemeral elements of the poem.

Commenting on Dryden's satirical thrusts, Bonamy Dobree says : "His attack is always superb, plunging you straight into the sweeping movement of his theme, as for instance in the first of his three wide-embracing occasional pieces, *Absalom and Achitophel.* This, called by him simply 'A Poem' and best described by Dr. Ian Jack as a 'witty, heroic poem', was written for the purpose of setting public feeling against Lord Shaftesbury, leader of the Whig faction, scheming to exclude the Catholic Duke of York from the succession, and perhaps put the King's natural son, the Duke of Monmouth, on the throne. Thus Dryden opens with a deliciously bland excuse for Charles II's virile manifestations: Lines 1-10. And then we are led into the story or, rather, situation. Though the poem is not primarily a satire, the satirical element soon appears—in the biting description of the English, the Jews of the story: Lines 47-50. Only a modicum of historical knowledge is needed to enjoy the poem; the drama unrolls itself to culminate in the great temptation scene, where Achitophel (Shaftesbury) lures Absalom (Monmouth) to his doom, pricking him into saying : 'Why am I scanted by a niggard birth ?' (Lines 369-72). Achitophel's reaction to his triumph is pressed home with deliberate Miltonism : 'Him staggering so, when hell's dire agent found...:' (Lines 373-5), the grip never being relaxed through the more than thousand lines. Yet Dryden, always in control, orders the rise and fall, eases the tension as he will, partly by pace, but largely by the characters, in the main satirically drawn. The most famous of them is Achitophel though he himself thought that of Zimri (Buckingham) 'worth the whole poem', since it was 'not bloody, but ridiculous enough', in fact more subtle as being raillery rather than bludgeoning. Yet Shaftesbury must always be the favourite, as it contains more poetic power : 'for close designs and crooked counsels fit...' (Lines 152-198), the pressure continuing for some 50 lines without a hint of monotony, the caesuras being brilliantly varied in depth as well as position as stroke follows devastating stroke. Other personages crowd upon the scene, treated bitterly, scornfully, or disdainfully as occasion serves, sometimes with one or two deft shafts of ridicule, as, for instance, Shimei (Bethel) who 'did wisely from expensive sins refrain.....for gain' (Lines 587-8). The religious sects receive due buffeting, as do the petty political intriguers together with the deluded populace. Not for a moment does the poem fail in pungency : and through it pierces Dryden's innate conservatism, summed up in one phrase : 'For innovation is the blow of fate' (Line 800).

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Very different is *The Medal*, again directed against Shaftesbury, where Dryden achieved sheer Juvenalian satire. *MacFlecknoe*, on the other hand, is a gloriously comic mock-heroic, the first in the language, in which Dryden lampooned Shadwell, treated with equal contempt in the second part of *Absalom and Achitophel*. The opening is delusively magniloquent : 'All human things are subject to decay', etc. The account of the enthronement of Shadwell as successor to the throne of Nonsense proceeds with a gorgeous pomposity. The piece is variegated by parodied echoes of other poets all the while that the low is exalted, and fantastic absurdities rocketed to dazzling heights.

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A General Note On The Satires Of Dryden

(Cazamian)

Dryden was over fifty when he wrote his great satires--*Absalom and Achitophel* (in two parts, 1681 and 1682); *The Medal* (1682); and *MacFlecknoe* (1682). His genius at this time had attained its full maturity and vigour, and he was the master of perfect poetic expression. The motives which prompted these satires were not of one single kind. Personal conviction certainly counted for much. Following his tastes and the tendencies of his temperament, Dryden put his weight on the side of the monarchy. Suspicious of the Earl of Shaftesbury and of the principles with which the popular cause identified itself, he was led to denounce the most dangerous partisans of this cause, the middle-class Whigs of the town, in *The Medal*. Against his former friend, Shadwell, whom he gives the name of MacFlecknoe, he had many grievances—a now manifest divergence of political opinions, the antipathy of an artistic nature as against a vulgar temperament, the legitimate resentment following a personal attack made by Shadwell on him (in *The Medal of John Bayes*, 1682). But, at the same time, he did not forget that he was supporting the cause of the King, and that he wrote with the implicit approval of the royal court. As the poet-laureate, he knew that he was expected to show both skill and self-command if he was engaged in strife during his tenure of office.

This is the explanation of the superiority of art in Dryden's satires. At times the violence of his tone is equal to that of his contemporaries like John Oldham (1653-83). Like Oldham, he knew how to hate strongly. But his mastery of expression allowed him in any case a careful attention to form; and the fire of his inspiration was tempered by the full and clear consciousness of the artist.

As a precaution against a possible turn of political fortunes, Dryden made a certain concession in his denunciation of Shaftesbury. The passage in which Shaftesbury, the Magistrate as distinguished

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from the meddling politician, receives a tribute of praise, was introduced into the poem after the acquittal of the man whom the King and his supporters tried to ruin. There is little doubt that Dryden was influenced by the trend of circumstances. His sincere esteem for certain qualities of Shaftesbury could not be easily expressed when he himself was pursuing the latter's condemnation. The acquittal of Shaftesbury restored to Dryden part of his independence. There is no need to accuse Dryden of baseness in this matter; but it must be recognised that he did not rise above the part of the political agent which he was called upon to play because of the royal patronage.

The matter of Dryden's satirical work is not original. The utilisation of biblical personages and events for the purpose of satire was something very familiar. In 1680, a hostile pamphleteer compared Monmouth to Absalom; in 1681, a satirist likened Shaftesbury to Achitophel. Dryden made use of this ready-made frame and, in making use of it, he displayed all the classical power of form. Aided by a clear and well-thought-out plan, his construction acquires a rare architectural quality. However, *Absalom and Achitophel* batrays some uncertainty, a development that is not balanced in every part. But the details are worked in by a touch that is broad and free, with a wonderful infallibility. The irony of the satire, at times indulgent and fraught with good nature, at others much more severe, controls the action, and groups the figures and their movement into one general irresistible suggestion. The poem succeeds in creating an impression of the innate goodness of an indulgent King, and of his beneficent majesty, and arousing the reader's sympathy. Behind the attractive but misguided son, and bathed in a doubtful light of ridiculous or ominous hue, stand the fomenters of revolt, dominated by the evil counsellor. The argumentation in the poem and the speeches in it enhance its persuasive quality. Everything in the poem converges with admirable unity to the same end. The portraits with which the poem abounds especially reveal the art of Dryden. In these portraits we admire the very fine sense of delicate touch, the felicity of picturesque characterisation; above all, as Coleridge said, the living truth of organic wholes. Nowhere else do we find so free a display of Dryden's classicism, enriched and set off as it is by a romanticism of the imagination.

The style illustrates both (that is, classicism and romanticism). There is a just accuracy and a guarded fitness; the fever of intellectual imagination is now sobered, and with it the "conceits" have disappeared. The inventive genius of the writer brings about an alliance of words and ideas in which brilliancy and novelty harmonise with the demands of taste. But all the central warmth, all the imaginative ardour remains; it acts as an animating force within the expression itself, lending it energy, vividness, and vitality. Condensed in brief evocations, in sober, striking images, the power of poetic suggestion is here to be found in its fullness, in no way hindered by the exten-

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of the writer's critical judgment. The writer's critical faculty and his creative verve do not impair each other, because they cannot be distinguished one from the other. The style of Dryden, in his most decidedly classical pieces, is above all an inspired style; its purity and its firmness, just like its course and its lustre, are a result of the union of spontaneity with artistic skill.

Dryden's satirical vein owes its outstanding quality to the fact that it represents a reconciliation between the scholarly ideal and popular inspiration. It remains popular because of its biblical setting, its imaginative theme, its direct allusions, and the portraits to which the reader could always attach a name. It is scholarly by virtue of its deportment, its relative moderation, the choice and the dignity of its expression, the generality of the thought, and that standard value, that impersonal significance, which Dryden has vested in the individual and at the same time representative figures of Zimri, Achitophel, and Shimei.

Towards the end of 1682, there appeared a second part of *Absalom and Achitophel*, published like the first anonymously, and in no way called for by the plan of the first. It is the work of a writer other than Dryden, but he had inserted therein two very fine passages, the portraits of Doeg and Og (Settle and Shadwell). Here the satire is no longer restrained by the desire for sober reserve which characterised the earlier poem, and a tremendous power of scornful realism finds vent in it.

Shadwell, the dramatist, and a Whig, is the hero of *Mac-Flecknoe*. The terrible denunciation to which he is subjected owes its origin to a disagreement in which there is an admixture of political motives, but of which the dominant reasons are of an individual order. Dryden therefore uses, and liberally, the right which he recognises in the satirist of attacking, not only the vice, but the vicious. This personal satire has all the characteristics of a comic, mock-heroic fantasy—the pompous crowning, by Flecknoe, a prince among poetasters, of an heir worthy of himself. The blending of a crushing force of mockery with the sovereign good humour of a merry giant remains the particular feature of this poem.

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"Dryden occupies the foremost place in the foremost ranks of English didactic writers. His satire is appalling, and tremendous; and not the less so, for its extreme polish and splendour. It excites our indignation against its objects, not only on account of the follies, or faults, which it imputes to them, but also on account of their writhing beneath the infliction of so splendid a weapon. We forget the offender in the awfulness and majesty of the power by which he is crushed. Instead of shrinking at the horror of the carnage, we are lost in admiration at the brilliancy of the victory. Like the lightning of heaven, the satire of Dryden throws a splendour around the objects which it destroys. He has immortalised the persons whom he

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branded whith infamy and contempt; for who would have remembered Shadwell, if he had not been handed down to ever-lasting fame as MacFlecknoe ?" (Henry Neele, 1827-29,

Lectures On English Poetry)

"But there is a difference between a spontaneous effusion of rage and hate, and a cold and malignant preparation of bitterness. The satire which indignation makes will always be the most sympathised with; and the genial man, like Dryden, the most admired. Dryden professes to prefer Juvenal to Horace for his own reading; and this I can quite understand. There are the marks of personal heat in old Dryden's satires, and generally a blending of humour and passion, a qualification of scorn by fun, which show you that it was natural for him to hold that opinion. In him, as in Juvenal and some others, the personality and the savageness are accompanied by traces of the satirist's other private qualities—his wisdom, fancy, homeliness. The goodness of his nature shows itself when he is angry even; consequently you sympathise with him, and do not pity his victims so much." (James Hannay, 1854, *Satire and Satirists)*.

"There are passages of Dryden's satires in which every couplet has not only the force but the actual sound of a slap in the face. The rapidity of movement from one couplet to the other is another remarkable characteristic. Even Pope, master as he was of verse, often fell into the fault of isolating his couplets too much, as if he expected applause between each, and wished to give time for it. Dryden's verse, on the other hand, strides along with a careless Olympian motion, as if the writer were looking at his victims rather with a kind of good-humoured scorn than with any elaborate triumph." (George Saintsbury, 1881, *Dryden*) (*Englishmen of Letters*)

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Charles II often compared with King David and Achitophel an evil counsellor.

discrediting the Earl of Shaftsbury and the Whigs:

4

"Absalom and Achitophel"—A General Survey

Absalom and Achitophel is Dryden's best-known poem. It is the supreme example of a masterpiece written to order, a topical piece of Tory propaganda written probably at the suggestion of Charles II himself, with the specific aim of discrediting the Earl of Shaftesbury and the Whigs.

When Dryden wrote this poem, the parallel between certain incidents related in the Old Testament and the contemporary situation had already been recognised. Charles II was often compared to King David, and Achitophel was a familiar term for an evil counsellor. Dryden was not trying to be original; he was using a story and names which already were well-known. In addition, the Old Testament framework lends an air of sacred truth to the modern story, and gives the impression that man's revolt against his King is a recurrent phenomenon in history. Indeed, Dryden's treatment of the biblical narrative subtly suggests that this revolt itself offers a parallel to Adam's revolt against God as a consequence of his surrender to the temptations of the Devil. And we must remember that to the seventeenth-century reader the Bible was the most familiar and authoritative book to which a poet could allude. So by suggesting the parallels of God, King David, and King Charles II; Adam, Absalom, and the Duke of Monmouth; and Devil, Achitophel, and the Earl of Shaftesbury; and by equating the contemporary revolt against the King (Charles II) with the scriptural accounts of revolt by Absalom and Adam, Dryden had morally won his case even before he started writing the poem.

As it is a foregone conclusion that David (that is, King Charles II) will win in the conflict, the conflict hardly generates any tension in the poem. Nor is there any narrative action. Although the stage is promisingly set with semi-epical and satirical characters, the plot dissolves into lengthy speeches. The dramatic events of Absalom's death and King David's weeping over that

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He hoped for a reconciliation between King Charles II and the Duke of Monmouth.

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death* had no parallel in the contemporary political situation, and so Dryden could not have included them. The indications are, in fact, that he hoped for a reconciliation between King Charles II and the Duke of Monmouth.

The opening lines of many of Dryden's poems have a striking or arresting quality. In *Absalom and Achitophel*, the display of humour, seriousness, and tact, in the opening lines, is masterly. It was essential to Dryden's argument to show that Absalom's illegitimacy was the basic weakness in the Whig case, but at the same time he had to persuade the readers to respect and sympathise with Absalom's father, the King:

> In pious times, ere priest-craft did begin,
> Before polygamy was made a sin;
> When man, on many, multiplied his kind,
> Ere one to one was, cursedly, confined:
> When nature prompted, and no law denied
> Promiscuous use of concubine and bride;
> Then, Israel's monarch, after heaven's own heart
> His vigorous warmth did, variously, impart
> To wives and slaves: and, wide as his command,
> Scattered his maker's image through the land. (*Lines 1-10*)

This account of the royal promiscuity as a genial excess of vitality is certainly amusing, but Dryden's enemies called him a cynical apologist for his royal patron (especially because Dryden refers to a Christian marriage as the cursed confining of one to one). But we may also see a hint in this passage that the tactful extenuation of Charles II's behaviour is merely a trick to allow Dryden to criticise the King's sexual misconduct and political blunders in begetting bastards. The whole of this passage is ironical, written in exactly the jovial/cynical manner Charles might himself have employed to condone his misdeeds. Dryden had to be tactful when writing about Charles, but he also had the courage to be critical, and the weapon he chose was irony. Like Chaucer's humour is clear-sighted and not indulgent to the follies it amusingly depicts.

Absalom and Achitophel does not have much action in it. It has been compared to a masterpiece of painting with its canvas "crowded with figures, clearly divided into two opposing groups and painted in varying perspective." In both its design and its material, however, its structure is complex. The poem opens with a narrative and the character-sketches of the main characters (Lines 1-229). The grand dialogue of seduction follows (Lines 230-476) exemplifying in action the characters of Achitophel and his victim

* In the Old Testament, Achitophel's advice is not taken and he hangs himself. Absalom, riding on a mule, is caught by the head in the branches of an oak-tree and is killed by Joab and others. King David's reaction to the news of his sons death is given in lines which have become famous: "O, my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would to God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

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(Absalom). The scene then opens wider, to expose the rout of malcontents and trouble-makers behind Achitophel (Lines 477-681); and it closes on Absalom's rebellion (Lines 682-752). The main political issue is then taken up. The author admits the danger of the absolutism against which the Whigs claimed to be fighting (Lines 759-64). But (Lines 765-76) even if the common view of the kingship is justified—as based not on divine right but on a covenant between the ruler and the people—that covenant is continuous, and cannot be contracted out of by altering the succession. The author next passes to the cognate problems of limiting the royal prerogative and popular power (Lines 777-94), and concludes with arguments against resisting the ruler to the ultimate destruction of the common welfare (Lines 795-810).

The political thesis of the poem has been stated as a calm and reasonable reply to the seductive arguments of Achitophel. It is strengthened by a Tory counter-attack in terms of human quality—the rogues' gallery of Whigs (Lines 491-681) is balanced by a series of portraits of the king's friends (Lines 811-932). The poem ends with a dramatic monologue by David himself (Lines 933-1025). The main purpose of the poem was, of course, the vindication of Charles II.

The style of the poem, for all its variety of tones, is essentially heroic. The heroic style, according to Dryden, is one in which "the plot, the characters, the wit, the passions, the descriptions, are all exalted above the level of common converse, as high as the imagination of the poet can carry them." Such a style is appropriate both to biblical allegory and to a narrative of great political events. For the epic treatment of a biblical story, Dryden had several precedents in contemporay literature.

Absalom and Achitophel is heroic not only in style, but in the matter and scale of the action. It is heroic, too, in much of its characterisation—in the flattering descriptions of the king's friends, where the qualities of loyalty and service are exemplified in ideal terms, and also in the portraits of Achitophel and Absalom. Tory pamphleteers had already described Shaftesbury as the chief advocate for hell, as old Machiavelli, as Mephistopheles, the fiend that haunts both Houses of Parliament. Dryden lifts this abusive commonplace to a heroic (and ironic) level by emphasising Achitophel's virtues and ability. This effect is also achieved by drawing in parallels to Milton's "arch-Angel ruined"—in the long, exquisitely seductive speeches to Absalom, the allusions to Lucifer in the address to the reader (Lines 66-73), and in Miltonic parody (Lines 373-5). The character of Absalom is more simply heightened; it owes much to the tradition of the heroic play, in which the struggle of duty and ambition, honour and passion, is the central theme. The disparity between birth and aspirations (Lines 366-72) is a common ground for complaint. Absalom's unlawful ambition, though it becomes active

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under Achitophel's flattering hand, has its origin in his nobility. Both Absalom and Achitophel exemplify—one seriously enough, the other satirically—the tragic character as Dryden describes it in the Preface to *Troilus and Cressida*.

The success of *Absalom and Achitophel* in treating contemporary events in heroic terms depends on the deliberate incongruity between its subject and its style—although the degree of incongruity continually varies and at times disappears altogether. In itself, the perfunctory intervention of God at the end of the poem—to seal the triumph of Charles as a pensioner of Louis XIV—is as absurd as the divine fire-extinguisher in *Annus Mirabilis*, but it can be accepted as a compliment to Charles and as having a general reference to divine providence because the prophetic nature of the concluding lines positively forbids the reader to take them quite literally. Dryden is not only showing that he is aware of a certain disparity between his fable and the historical events; he is also using it deliberately to employ a much more sophisticated response to the working of the divine providence in national affairs. These lines are recognised as part of the rhetorical mechanism that has promoted a critical and realistic attitude throughout the poem, an attitude that enables the reader to accept their serious meaning without feeling himself committed to an extravagant fancy.

In the writing of *Absalom and Achitophel*, what is perhaps most remarkable is the way in which Dryden used the allegory. There were serious difficulties in the way of investing a contemporary subject with any degree of grandeur. The very familiarity of the subject-matter was in this respect against the poet. Such unavoidable words as "parliament", "jury", "writ", and "committee" defy an elevated medium; they would have reduced Dryden's poem to the mock-heroic level, precisely as "Flecknoe", "Ogleby", and "Shadwell" reduce *MacFlecknoe*. The biblical allegory helped Dryden to raise his poem to a dignified level without falling into bathos.

But this was not the only advantage of employing the allegory. The allegory also acted as the instrument of Dryden's brilliant wit, and helped to give the poem an air of objectivity more impressive than the direct exclamatoriness so common in political satire. The action stands out in relief, because it is misleadingly over-simplified. The fact that such figures as The King, The Tempter, and The Mob are so readily recognised carries the action a step further from the realm of mere political wrangling in the direction of universal philosophical or poetic truth.

Dryden did not have much respect for mere lampoons. He did not want that his poem should remain on the same level as the majority of the productions of the "violent paper scuffle." By employing the biblical allegory and adapting it to his purpose, he

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Dryden had no respect for lampoons.

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found one method of raising political satire to the level of high art.

The peculiar quality of the poem, however, lies in the wit which pervades it—from the ironic opening picture of Charles II's harem-court, * through the representation of Achitophel as the Devil's advocate, to such detail as the parallel of Moses and Corah and the portrait of Issachar. Dryden's wit is explicitly and brilliantly satiric in the characters of the Whigs and Oates. To these portraits, touched with every satirical device, the poem owes its fame. But *Absalom and Achitophel* is not a satire in the limited modern sense, though its author called it such and thought the charachter of Zimri worth the whole poem. In the Dedication of his translation of Juvenal (1693), Dryden points out that, while nowadays we restrict the term satire to "invective poems", the Roman used it in a "more general signification." The early Latin satirist Varro describes his work thus : "Notwithstanding that those pieces of mine are sprinkled with a kind of mirth and gaiety : yet many things are there inserted, which are drawn from the very entrails of philosophy, and many things are severely argued." *Absalom and Achitophel*—part history and propaganda, part satire, part eulogy —is satirical in this mixed tradition. The complexity of its form and art is pointed out in Dr. Johnson's comment. "If it be considered as a poem political and controversial it will be found to comprise all the excellences of which the subject is susceptible : acrimony of censure, elegance of praise, artful delineation of characters, variety and vigour of sentiment, happy turns of language, and pleasing harmony of numbers; and all these raised to such a height as can scarcely be found in any other English composition."

The supreme excellence of *Absalom and Achitophel* lies in its descriptions of character. Dryden's exquisite etchings live in the memory with unequalled tenacity. The pre-eminence of Achitophel among the opponents of the royal government is unmistakably signalised by his being commissioned to master the shaken virtue of Absalom. When the satire proceeds from the leader to the followers, no composite body of malcontents has ever been analysed with surer discernment and more perfect insight. The honest Whigs, the utilitarian radicals, the speculators who use the party for their private ends, the demagogues and mob-orators who are the natural product of faction—all are there; but so, too, are the republicans on principle, headed by survivors of the fanatics who believed in their own theocracy. Of course, the numerical strength of the party is made up by the unthinking crowd that takes up a cry—in this case, the cry 'No Popery'. Of the chiefs of the faction, for the most part, a few incisive lines, or even a damning epithet, suffice to dispose; but there are exceptions, suggested by public or by private considerations. In the latter class, Dryden's own statement obliges us to include Zimri—

* In this opening picture, the old Puritan identification of the English with the Chosen People is turned to justify a licentious king.

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a character which he declares to be 'worth the whole poem'. What he says of his intentions in devising this masterpiece of wit, and of his success in carrying them into execution, illustrates at once the discretion with which he applied his satirical powers, and the limitation which his nature, as well as judgment, imposed upon their use. Moral indignation was not part of Dryden's satirical stock. Even the hideously true likeness of Titus Oates (Corah) preserves the accent of sarcasm which had suited the malicious sketch of Shimei, the inhospitable sheriff of the city; it is as if the poet's blame could never come with so full a tone as the praise which, in the latter part of the poem, is gracefully distributed among the chief supporters of the crown.

Absalom and Achitophel creates an awkward problem for modern readers. It is regarded as a striking achievement. It is certainly a unique blend of satirical portraiture, semi-epical conflict, and didactic argument. But most people today cannot share Dryden's strong royalist, conservative opinions. How can then one whole-heartedly praise Charles II's official propagandist, the Tory partisan who saw the constitutional struggles of the time as a contest between a god-like King and a devilish Whig opportunist ? Various answers to this question have been suggested. One answer is that Dryden was a moderate royalist who wanted both Parliament and King to obey the established law of the land. Another answer is that Charles II and Shaftesbury are type-portraits of the good ruler and the evil rebel, true symbols of the eternal conflict between good and evil in every period of history, but not necessarily accurate assessments of Charles II and Shaftesbury. Dryden's poem, from this point of view, becomes poetically, if not historically, true. But the problem is not so simple. We cannot divide all the forces, inner and outer, which act upon the human mind, into two clear and exclusive categories of good and evil.

"*Absalom and Achitophel* is not primarily a satire, but a political narrative written to vindicate the King and his court party. It consists of a witty historical introduction leading up to the seduction of Absalom (Monmouth, the 'Protestant Duke') by Achitophel (Shaftesbury); a brilliant series of satiric portraits of Whig personalities; a medial discussion of the fundamental political issues behind the crisis of 1676-81; a series of panegyrical portraits of the King's friends; and a statement of Charles's own case. The application of the biblical story of Absalom is not a novelty; but Dryden's use of the old testament is wonderfully consistent, complex and witty, and the whole story is beautifully turned to serve his political design. The heroic style, with echoes of the grand seduction in *Paradise Lost* and the exalted debates of the heroic play, is an instrument of both panegyric and satire; and the portraits of the Whigs illustrate the notion of satire as a kind of heroic poetry, gaining its effects by irony and 'fine raillery', which Dryden later set out in his essay on Juvenal and Persius. In *Absalom and Achitophel* he lifts the tradition of English

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satire, as represented in the work of John Oldham, Andrew Marvell and Samuel Butler, to a new level of art and sets the tone of the dominant mode in Augustan verse. A *Second Part* which followed in 1682 is mainly the work of Nahum Tate, with a number of satiric portraits by Dryden. Dryden's later attack on Shaftesbury in *The Medal* (1682), following the failure of the indictment for treason, has great energy and intensity; but it is on a smaller scale, with neither the variety nor the heroic ironies of *Absalom and Achitophel*".

Here are a few famous comments on *Absalom and Achitophel* :

"This poem (*Absalom and Achitophel*) is said to be one of the most perfect allegorical pieces that our language has produced. It is carried on through the whole with equal strength and propriety. The veil is nowhere laid aside. There is a just similarity in the characters, which are exactly portrayed; the lineaments are well-copied; the colouring is lively; the groupings show the hand of a master, and may serve to convince us that Dryden knew his own power when he asserted that he found it easier to write severely than gently." (Samuel Derrick, 1760, *Miscellaneous Works of John Dryden*).

"You will find this a good gage or criterion of genius—whether it progresses and evolves, or only spins upon itself. Take Dryden's Achitophel and Zimri, Shaftesbury and Buckingham; every line adds to or modifies the character, which is as it were a-building up to the very last verse; whereas, in Pope's Timon, etc., the first two or three couplets contain all the pith of the character, and the twenty or thirty lines that follow are so much evidence or proof of overt acts of jealousy, or pride, or whatever it may be that is satirised."
(S.T. Coleridge, 1832, *Table Talk*)

"The greatest of his satires is *Absalom and Achitophel*,—that work in which his powers become fully known to the world and which, as many think, he never surpassed. The admirable fitness of the English couplet for satire had never been shown before; in less skilful hands it had been ineffective; he does not frequently, in his poem, carry the sense beyond the second line, which except when skilfully contrived, as it often is by himself, is apt to enfeeble the emphasis; his triplets are less numerous than usual, but energetic. The spontaneous ease of expression, the rapid transitions, the general elasticity and movement, have never been excelled. It is superfluous to praise the discrimination and vivacity of the chief characters." (Henry Hallam, 1837-39, *Introductions to the Literature of Europe*).

In one respect this poem (*Absalom and Achitophel*) stands alone in literature. A party pamphlet dedicated to the hour, it is yet immortal. No poem in our language is so interpenetrated with contemporary allusion, with contemporary portraiture, with contemporary point; yet no poem in our language has been more enjoyed by

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succeeding generations of readers. Scores of intelligent men who know by heart the characters of Zimri and Achitophel are content to remain in ignorance of the political careers of Buckingham and Shaftesbury. The speech in which Achitophel incites his faltering disciple has been admired and recited by hundreds who have been blind to its historical fidelity and to its subtle personalities."(J.C. Collins,1878-95, "Dryden", *Quartarly Review*).

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"deals with Political Problems of 1679-81"

5

"Absalom and Achitophel"—Its Historical Background

Dryden's poem, *Absalom and Achitophel*, deals with the political crisis of 1679-81. Popular opposition to Charles II was concentrated in the Whig or "country" party. The policy of the Whigs, under the leadership of the Earl of Shaftesbury, included anti-Popery, the checking of arbitrary government by the King, and an end to the alliance of Charles with the Catholic King of France. Charles had no legitimate son or daughter. His immediate successor would be his Catholic brother, James, Duke of York. But the Whig Party were determined to exclude James from the succession because of James's Catholic faith. The Whigs decided to promote the rival claim of Charles's bastard son, the Duke of Monmouth, who was a Protestant.

The question of succession to the throne acquired a new urgency and importance in the autumn of 1678 when Titus Oates submitted a circumstantial narrative of a Jesuit conspiracy before the King and his council. The House of Commons came to the conclusion that a damnable and hellish plot had been formed by Catholics for the assassination of the King and for subverting the government and destroying the Protestant religion. Between December, 1678 and July, 1681 over thirty people were condemned for involvement in the Popish Plot. The King, who did not believe Titus Oates's version of the affair, suspected that Shaftesbury and his party had instigated Oates, but Oates's statements intensified popular suspicion of the Duke of York. In April, 1679 the House of Commons resolved that, as the Duke of York was a Papist, the hopes of his succeeding to the English throne had given the greatest encouragement and support to the conspiracies against the King and the government and the Protestant religion. As demands for the exclusion of the Duke of York from the succession increased, Charles kept him out of England as much as possible.

But in 1681 conditions became favourable for Charles. Oates and his fellows began to be discredited. Parliament met at Oxford in March, but Charles dissolved it, publishing his reasons for the

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dissolution soon afterwards. Whig rejoinders to the King's reasons were answered in *His Majesty's Declaration Defended*—written apparently by Dryden in his office as Historiographer-Royal. Early in July (1681), Shaftesbury was committed to the Tower on a charge of high treason. *Absalom and Achitophel*, undertaken at the King's desire, was written during these months of the royal triumph; and it was published in November, probably with the intention of prejudicing Shaftesbury's trial at the end of the month. Shaftesbury was, however, acquitted; but Dryden's poem was an immediate popular success, running at least into three editions within four months.

The application of the story of David, Absalom and Achitophel to current politics was nothing new or original. The Puritans had used the name Achitophel for the advisers of Charles and the Royalists had also adapted the biblical story to their needs. At the Restoration, many preachers and poets emphasised the similarities between the fortunes of David and those of Charles II; and the events of 1670's increased the potentialities of the story of Absalom as political allegory. Several Tory propagandists used it in 1680. For instance, they described the Whigs as "they that set on Absalom to steal away the hearts of the people from the King"; and they warned all young people "to beware of such counsellors as the old Achitophel." Dryden's work was the imaginative elaboration of these comparisons on a grand scale. With great ingenuity and wit, he drew Hebrew and English history together into a pattern, and enriched his allegory with a wealth of secondary allusions to the Bible.

Charles II had no legitimate sons or daughter:
Policy of whigs under Earl of Shaftsbury was to exclude his catholic brother 'Duke of York' James II decided to promote the rival claim of Charles's bastard Son 'Duke of Monmouth - a Protestant'.

The applications of the story David, Absalom and Achitophel to Current-Politics was nothing new or original - Puritans had used the name Achitophel for the advisers of King Charles.

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6

Historical Personages In "Absalom and Achitophel★"

Charles II. As a consequence of the decision by England to restore monachy, Charles, who had remained in exile till then, entered London on May 29, 1660, amid popular acclamations. Behind a mask of brilliant frivolity and debauchery, he concealed a singularly acute political intelligence. All other considerations were subordinated to a fixed determination on no account to lose his throne, or to give up his personal pleasures. His primary political aim was to achieve his own independence of Parliament without the risk of a civil war. But to make himself independent of Parliament he required a standing army, and money from extraneous sources, and this money had to be obtained from his cousin, Louis XIV of France. On his accession he had no intention of challenging Parliament; he had been recalled by a nation which intended Parliament to be predominant in the sense that it had claimed to be supreme before the outbreak of the civil war. He personally favoured toleration because toleration of Puritanism was obviously the condition of toleration of Roman Catholicism; he opposed vindictive action by the triumphant cavaliers because he did not intend to arouse the hostility of the other party. He virtually allowed the cavalier Parliament to go its own way in the matter of intolerant legislation. He did not allow his own hand to be felt; but in 1670 he made with Louis the secret Treaty of Dover by which he engaged England to the service of France, the result being the second Dutch war. But his tentative Declaration of Indulgence in 1672 taught him once for all the hopelessness of attempting to secure civil liberties for his Roman Catholic subjects. It produced the Test Act which excluded Roman Catholics from office, and which converted Shaftesbury from being the King's minister into becoming the leader of the opposition.

Charles showed a distinct tendency to absolutism by finding excuses for frequent prorogations of Parliament. At the bidding of

* This Chapter contains sketches of various historical personalities as these have been portrayed by historians. Dryden's portrayal of these personages has been dealt with in another Chapter of this book.

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At the instance of Louis XIV Prologues Parliament in 1676 for 15 months - Shaftesbury and others opposed the move.

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Louis of France, Charles prorogued Parliament in 1676 for fifteen months. When Parliament re-assembled in 1677, Shaftesbury and other members of the opposition maintained that the long prorogation was equivalent to a dissolution. They were committed to the Tower; and Shaftesbury was not released until, he had asked the pardon of the House of Lords. Parliament did not meet till October, 1680. A bill to exclude the Duke of York from the succession, on the ground that he was a Roman Catholic, was passed by the House of Commons, but it was rejected by the House of Lords, chiefly because of the powerful speeches of Halifax; and Charles and his brother once more felt secure. Parliament was dissolved in January, 1681. The King called a new Parliament at Oxford on March 21, as the excitement in London ran too high. The chief members of the Whig party, Shaftesbury among them, attended, armed and accompanied by their followers. Charles dissolved the parliament, before it had transacted any business, on March 28. This was Charles's last parliament. He then had recourse to severe measures against his enemies, including the Duke of Monmouth and the Earl of Shaftesbury. For four years, he ruled without a parliament as an absolute monarch. He died on February 6, 1685, after a brief illness ((being received into the Roman Catholic Church on his death-bed)).

James II

Charles had married Catherine, daughter of the King of Portugal, but the royal couple had no children. Charles had many mistresses. These included the Duchess of Cleveland and the Duchess of Portsmouth, Nell Gwynn, and Lucy Walters. By them he had many children, among them the boys who were made Dukes of Southampton, Grafton, Richmond, and St. Albans. The Duke of Monmouth was also one of his bastard sons.

Shaftesbury. Anthony Ashley Cooper was born on July 22, 1621, and received his education at Exeter College, Oxford. In the civil war, after serving in the royal army, he joined the parliamentary forces in 1644. At the Restoration, he was placed on the Privy Council, made Baron Ashley, and Chancellor of the Exchequer (1661). He showed great diligence and ability, and was a member of the Cabal. In 1672, he was made Earl of Shaftesbury and Lord Chancellor, but espousing the popular cause of Protestantism, he was dismissed in 1673, and joined the opposition. His violence led to his committal with Buckingham to the Tower in 1676, where he remained confined for two years until he submitted. He made use of the Popish Plot of 1678-80 to secure, among others, the judicial murder of his personal enemy, Lord Stafford. In 1679, he became Lord President, but a proposal to exclude James from the succession in favour of Monmouth gave Charles the opportunity for Shaftesbury's final dismissal. Attempts to foment rebellion against the King took him to the Tower again in 1681. Charged with treason, he was acquitted by a Whig Jury, and he fled to Holland in 1682. He died at Amsterdam on January 22, 1683. A

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man of great capacity and versatility, Shaftesbury was tru eonly to his own interests.

The following are the comments of the great historian, Thomas Babington Macaulay, on some of the historical personalities dealt with by Dryden in this poem :

The Duke of Buckingham. "Buckingham was a sated man of pleasure, who had turned to ambition as to a pastime. As he had tried to amuse himself with architecture and music, with writing farces and with seeking for the philosopher's stone, so he now (in 1671) tried to amuse himself with a secret negotiation and a Dutch war. He had already, rather from fickleness and love of novelty than from any deep design, been faithless to every party. At one time, he had ranked among the Cavaliers. At another time warrants had been out against him for maintaining a treasonable correspondence with the remains of the Republican party in the city. He was now again a courtier, and was eager to win the favour of the King by services from which the most illustrious of those who had fought and suffered for the royal house would have recoiled with horror."

Anthony Ashley Cooper (the Earl of Shaftesbur). "Ashley, with a far stronger head,and with a far fiercer and more earnest ambition (than Buckingham), had been equally versatile. But Ashley's versatility was the effect, not of levity, but of deliberate selfishness. He had served and betrayed a succession of governments. But he had timed all his treacheries so well that, through all revolutions, his fortunes had constantly been rising. The multitude,struck with admiration by a prosperity which, while everything else was constantly changing, remained unchangeable, attributed to him a prescience almost miraculous, and likened him to the Hebrew statesman of whom it is written that his counsel was as if a man had enquired of the oracle of God."

Titus Oates. "Titus Oates, a clergyman of the Church of England, had, by his disorderly life and heterodox doctrine, drawn on himself the censure of his spiritual superiors, had been compelled to quit his benefice, and had ever since led an infamous and vagrant life. He had once professed himself a Roman Catholic, and had passed some time on the Continent in English colleges of the order of Jesus. In these seminaries he had heard much wild talk about the best means of bringing England back to the true church (Roman Catholicism). From hints thus furnished he constructed a hideous romance, resembling rather a dream of a sick man than any transaction which ever took place in the real world. The Pope, he said, had entrusted the government of England to the Jesuits. The Jesuits had, by commissions under the seal of their Society, appointed Catholic clergymen, noblemen, and gentlemen, to all the highest offices in church and state. The Papists had burned down London once. They had tried to burn it down again. They were at that

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moment planning a scheme for setting fire to all the shipping in the Thames. They were to rise at a signal and massacre all their Protestant neighbours. A French army was at the same time to land in Ireland. All the leading statesmen and divines of England were to be murdered. Three or four schemes had been formed for assassinating the King. He was to be stabbed. He was to be poisoned in his medicine. He was to be shot with silver bullets. The public mind was so sour and excitable that these lies readily found credit with the vulgar." (This was the Popish Plot, which Titus Oates claimed to have discovered).

The Earl and, in 1682, Marquis of Halifax (Jotham in the poem : Lines 882-7). "Among the statesmen of that age, Halifax was, in genius, the first. His intellect was fertile, subtle, and capacious. His polished, luminous, and animated eloquence was the delight of the House of Lords. His conversation overflowed with thought, fancy, and wit. To the weight derived from talents so great and various he united all the influence which belongs to rank and ample possessions.....He was the chief of those politicians whom the two great parties contemptuously called Trimmers. Instead of quarrelling with this nickname, he assumed it as a title of honour, and vindicated with great vivacity the dignity of the appellation. Everything good, he said, trims between extremes". About his role in the House of Lords when the Exclusion Bill was to be discussed, Macaulay writes : "The whole nation now looked with breathless anxiety to the House of Lords. The assemblage of peers was large. The King himself was present. The debate was long, earnest, and occasionally furious. Shaftesbury and Essex were joined by the treacherous Sunderland. But the genius of Halifax bore down all opposition. Deserted by his most important colleagues, and opposed to a crowd of able antagonists, he defended the cause of the Duke of York in a succession of speeches which, many years later, were remembered as masterpieces of reasoning, of wit, and of eloquence. It is seldom that oratory changes votes. Yet the attestation of contemporaries leaves no doubt that, on this occasion, votes were changed by the oratory of Halifax. The bishops, true to their doctrine, supported the principle of hereditary right, and the Bill was rejected by a great majority."*

The Duke of Monmouth (Absalom in the poem). (The Duke of Monmouth was the illegitimate son of Charles II by his union with a mistress known as Lucy Walters). "Charles, while a wanderer on the Continent, had fallen in love with Lucy Walters, a Welsh girl of great beauty, but of weak understanding and dissolute manners. She became his mistress, and presented him with a son. A suspicious lover might have had his doubts; for the lady had several admirers, and was not supposed to be cruel to any. Charles, however, readily

* Dryden refers to the great victory of Halifax in the following lines:
Nor chose alone, but turned the balance too:
So much the weight of brave one man can do. (Lines 885-6)

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"James Croft" - Illegitimate Son of Charles II from Lucy Walters.

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took her word, and poured forth on little James Croft, as the boy was then called, overflowing fondness, such as seemed hardly to belong to that cool and careless nature. Soon after the Restoration, the young favourite made his appearance at Whitehall. He was lodged in the palace, attended by pages, and permitted to enjoy several distinctions which had till then been confined to princes of the blood royal. He was married, while in tender youth, to Anne Scott, heiress of the noble house of Buccleuch. Titles, and favours more substantial than titles, were lavished on him. He was made the Duke of Monmouth in England, Duke of Buccleuch in Scotland, a Knight of the Garter, Master of the Horse, and so on. His countenance was eminently handsome and engaging, his temper sweet, his manners polite and affable. Though a libertine, he won the hearts of the Puritans. Though he was known to have been privy to the shameful attack on Sir John Coventry,* he easily obtained the forgiveness of the Country Party. And soon the stain left by amours and midnight brawls was effaced by honourable exploits. When Charles and Louis united their forces against Holland, Monmouth commanded the English auxiliaries who were sent to the Continent, and approved himself a gallant soldier and not an unintelligent officer. On his return, he found himself the most popular man in the kingdom.....When he travelled, he was everywhere received with not less pomp, and with far more enthusiasm, than had been displayed when Kings had made progresses through the realm.† He was escorted from mansion to mansion by long cavalcades of armed gentlemen and yeomen. Cities poured forth their whole population to receive him. Electors thronged around him, to assure him that their votes were at his disposal."

Laurence Hyde (Hushai in the poem : Lines 888-97). "Laurence Hyed was the second son of the Chancellor Clarendon. He had excellent parts, which had been strengthened by parliamentary and diplomatic experience; but the infirmities of his temper detracted much from the effective strength of his abilities. Negotiator and courtier as he was, he never learned the art governing or of concealing his ambitions. When prosperous, he was insolent and boastful : when he sustained a check, his undisguised mortifications doubled the triumph of his enemies: very slight provocations sufficed to kindle his anger. His quickness and penetration would have made him a consummate man of business but for his self-sufficiency and impatience. He was a Cavalier of the old school, a zealous champion of the crown and of the church, and a hater of republicans and non-conformists. He succeeded Essex at the Treasury."

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*. Dryden makes a reference to this attack in Lines 39-40 of the poem: "And Amnon's murder....."

†. Dryden refers (in Lines 727-40) to the warm reception that the Duke of Monmouth got from the people in the course of his journey through the realm.

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Charles II had no Son or daughter from his Queen 'Catherine of Barganza'.

7

Dryden's Treatment of History In "Absalom and Achitophel"

OR

Absalom and Achitophel as a Mirror To The Age

Absalom and Achitophel deals with a brief period during the reign of Charles II who became King of England in 1660 and whose reign is generally know as the Restoration. Dryden deals with the crisis that was caused by the issue of the sucession to the throne. Charles II had no child by his wife, Catherine of Braganza, whom he had married in 1662, though he had a number of illegitimate children by his mistresses and concubines. In the absence of any legitimate child, the crown was to pass to his brother, the Duke of York. But the Duke of York was a Roman Catholic, and the majority of the English population did not want a Roman Catholic King. Two political parties had made their appearance on the scene—the Tories who supported the King in his intention to decide the question of succession in favour of his brother, the Duke of York, and the Whigs who, opposing the claims of the Duke of York, set up the Duke of Monmouth, an illegitimate son of the King (by a mistress called Lucy Walters) and a Protestant, as a claimant to the throne. The Earl of Shaftesbury was one of the principal leaders of the Whig Party. The problem became more complicated when Titus Oates claimed that he had discovered a plot formed by the Roman Catholics to assassinate the King. This was the alleged Popish Plot, although subsequently it was proved to be utterly false. Dryden introduces all these political events in his poem. The Popish Plot is mentioned in Lines 108-115. Lines 230-302 and Lines 376-476 describe the Temptation scene in which the Earl of Shaftesbury is able to convince the Duke of Monmouth that there is a strong case for his claiming the throne. Shaftesbury cleverly employs flattery to raise Monmouth in his own estimation and then goes on to stimulate and stir Monmouth's ambition to become King.

Shaftesbury used monmouth to put up his claim for kingship -

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an ambition which had already vaguely formed itself in the Duke's mind. Lines 230-249 contain pure flattery while the rest of Shaftesbury's speech contains a reasoned thesis in support of Monmouth's claim to the throne. The effect of Shaftesbury's first speech on the Duke of Monmouth's mind is thus described by Dryden :

> What cannot praise effect in mighty minds,
> When flattery soothes, and when ambition blinds.
> (*Lines* 303-4)

The Duke of Monmouth hesitates and wavers but Shaftesbury, seeing that he has his victim in his grip, pursues his reasoning and is able to convert Monmouth fully to his point of view. The Duke of Monmouth finds it difficult to resist Shaftesbury's suggestion :

> Prevail yourself of what occasion gives,
> But try your title while your father lives (*Lines* 461-2).

Shaftesbury's victory over the mind of Monmouth is absolute. Dryden, not wishing to offend Monmouth who was a favourite of the King, does not condemn Monmouth's decision in unambiguous terms. His criticism of Monmouth is tempered with kind feelings :

> But charming greatness since so few refuse,
> 'Tis juster to lament him than accuse (*Lines* 485-6)

Dryden then goes on to catalogue the various political and religious elements that were ready to support the designs of Shaftesbury, all these elements being described as malcontents and traitors. The catalogue, however, seems endless to Dryden :

> Such were the tools; but a whole Hydra more.
> Remains, of sprouting heads too long to score.
> (*Lines* 541-2)

The brief speech that the Duke of Monmouth makes to his countrymen shows how successfully Shaftesbury had worked upon the Duke's mind. Monmouth's hypocrisy is well brought out in this speech. The Duke pretends that he has no axe to grind but that he is concerned only about the rights of the people. Referring to the King, he says :

> He gives, and let him give my right away;
> But why should he his own, and yours, betray ?
> (*Lines* 713-14)

And he offers them his tears as the only aid he can give them under the circumstances :

> Take then my tears (with that he wiped his eyes),
> 'Tis all the aid my present power supplies. (*Lines* 717-18)

Dryden himself takes the King's side in no uncertain terms. In Lines 759-810, he emphatically puts forward the theory that a King, once appointed, cannot be deposed by the people. If the people were to have the authority to remove their King whenever

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they so pleased, a King would become a slave to those whom he was expected to rule. Armed with the power to remove a King, the people would act most arbitrarily and irrationally. People would then be guided only by their passions and even the parliament might be infected by such "public lunacy". The people, says Dryden, should not disturb the foundations of the State and should certainly not demand a revolution which will have the effect of the "blow of fate." In other words, Dryden makes effective propaganda in favour of Charles II and the institution of monarchy, and there is no doubt that Dryden wrote as the spokeman of all the Royalists in the kingdom.

Dryden's treament of history in *Absalom and Achitophel* is substantially true to facts. Dryden wrote as a champion of the King or as a Royalist propagandist. He wrote this poem at the suggestion of the King himself, and the chief object of his writing it was to exalt the King in public esteem, to defend the Royalist elements of the court, and to denounce and castigate the malcontents and the rebels. Thus *Absalom and Achitophel* is a propaganda poem. That is to say, it is a kind of a political pamphlet. But while conceding all this, we must recognise the fact that the poem bears a stamp of authenticity. Dryden certainly writes as a partisan and yet, on the whole, he gives us a true picture of the spirit of the times, of the events of the period during which it was written, and of the personalities involved.

We get a remarkably true picture of the temper, tendencies, and character of the English populace from Dryden's poem. In giving us this picture, Dryden especially dwells upon the fickleness and the grumbling nature of the English nation :

> The Jews, a headstrong, moody, murmuring race,
> As ever tried the extent and stretch of grace;
> God's pampered people whom, debauched with ease,
> No King could govern, nor no God could please..... (*Lines* 45–8)

The English people, says Dryden, were not content with the freedom they enjoyed but were hungry for more freedom. They, in fact, envied the freedom that savages enjoy in a state of nature : "And thought that all but savages were slaves" (Line 56). Later in the poem, Dryden once again refers to the changefulness and inconstancy of the English people, with particular reference to their tendency to change their monarch every twenty years :

> For, governed by the moon, the giddy Jews
> Tread the same track when she the prime renews;
> And once in twenty years, their scribes record,
> By natural instinct they change their lord. (*Lines* 216–19)

It must, however, be admitted that fickleness is not a characteristic of the English people only. Almost all nations suffer from this

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weakness. "The changeable moods of nations are surprising," writes a well-known historian.

The Protestants' distrust of the Roman Catholics, and the disabilities and injustices under which the Roman Catholics laboured during the reign of Charles II are also realistically depicted. The Roman Catholics were regarded as the enemies of God. They were deprived of all positions of privilege and of their property. Their taxes were raised and they were the victims of other kinds of ill-treatment also. This is how Dryden refers to the harsh treatment meted out to the Roman Catholics :

> And every loss the men of Jebus* bore,
> They still were thought God's enemies the more.
> Thus, worn and weakened, well or ill-content,
> Submit they must to David's government :
> Impoverished and deprived of all command
> Their taxes doubled as they lost their land.....
> (*Lines* 90–95).

Dryden rightly lashes the clergy, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, for their hypocrisy and their mercenary motives. "For priests of all religions," he says, "are the same" (*Line* 99). They worship their gods and their deities, not from any genuine or deep religious sentiment, but because they earn their living from this worship.

Dryden's account of the Popish Plot and the atmosphere of general panic that it created is also historically true. This is how a historian describes the conditions that prevailed as a result of the publicity given to the alleged Popish Plot : "The excitement caused was prodigious, in a London still nervous after the plague and the Great Fire, with memories of Gunpowder Plot and an unreasoning terror of Jesuits and Popery. Panic ran riot. Armed Jesuits were reported everywhere. Women went out of doors carrying daggers. A veritable reign of terror began."† "Dryden calls this plot the nation's curse, and goes on to describe it thus :

> Bad in itself, but represented worse;
> Raised in extremes, and in extremes decried;
> With oaths affirmed, with dying vows denied;
> Not weighed or winnowed by the multitude,
> But swallowed in the mass, unchewed and crude.
> Some truth there was, but dashed and brewed with lies,
> To please the fools, and puzzle the wise. (*Lines* 108–115).

Dryden also refers to the deep and dangerous consequences of this plot, invented by Titus Oates and attested by false witnesses.

But it is in the portrayal of the historical personalities involved that Dryden shows himself as a master. *Absalom and Achitophel* has rightly been called a gallery of portraits. The historical per-

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* men of Jebus—persons belonging to the Roman Catholic faith.

† *A History of England* by Andre Maurois, Chapter X.

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sonalities fall into two groups—the Malcontents and the Loyalists. The Malcontents are led by Achitophel (the Earl of Shaftesbury). In Lines 150–212, Dryden gives us an unforgettable character of the Earl of Shaftesbury, the arch-conspirator. Shaftesbury is depicted as a man fit for "close designs" and "crooked counsels", "unfixed in principles", "unpleased in power", "in friendship false, implacable in hate." Shaftesbury's genius was closely allied to madness. He was "resolved to ruin or to rule the state." He was a man of unlimited and reckless ambition. Nor it is a one-sided portrait of Shaftesbury that we are given. Dryden shows a rare attitude of objectivity by recognising Shaftesbury's integrity and incorruptibility as a judge. All this is historically true.

Equally memorable is the portrait of Zimri, or the Duke of Buckingham, who is described as a man so various that he seemed to be a combination of innumerable temperaments (a man who did not stick to any opinion or any occupation for a long time, a man who in the course of one single month was "chemist, fiddler, statesman, and buffoon", one after the other.) The close resemblance between Dryden's sketch of the Duke of Buckingham and the description of Buckingham's character as given in any standard book of history, say, Macaulay's, is striking. Dryden has not done any violence to the facts of history; nor is he guilty of much exaggeration.

Shimei, or Slingsby Bethel (*Lines* 585-629), is also realistically drawn. Slingsby Bethel "never broke the Sabbath, but for gain." He heaped wealth by the most ready way, which was "to cheat and pray." During his tenure of office, evil-doers had a free hand. The crowning stroke in the portrait of Shimei comes with the description of Shimei's extreme stinginess. Shimei represents that fusion of austere Puritan Non-conformity and tight-fisted commercial individualism that made London an anti-Royalist stronghold. His name became proverbial for meanness, and Dryden has fully succeeded in creating a living portrait of the man.

Then, of course, there is the sketch of Corah or Titus Oates. Here, again, Dryden emphasises what are only the facts of history. Dryden depicts him as the son of a weaver, calls him a "monument of brass" (thus pinpointing Titus Oates's insolence and arrogance), mocks at his ruddy complexion (by virtue of which Oates could claim that a divine radiance played on his face), refers to his bogus degree of Doctor of Divinity, castigates him as an arch-conspirator and a false witness. The fact must be emphasised that, although Dryden writes with all the bitterness and venom of a partisan, the sketch that he gives us of this villain corresponds strictly to the accounts of the man that we get in books of history.

The Duke of Monmouth has been leniently treated for reasons that are well-known. The Duke of Monmouth was a favourite of

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the King himself and there was a possibility that he might become reconciled to the sovereign. But, even so, Dryden gives us a more or less true portrayal of the bastard's character and does not exonerate him completely. In describing him as "beautiful" and "brave", and as fully conscious of his position and status, and in referring to his warm excesses (like the murder of Sir John Coventry), Dryden is telling us only what every student of English history knows. Nor is there any exaggeration in Dryden's account of Monmouth's "progress" through the realm :

> From east to west his glories he displays,
> And, like the sun, the promised land surveys.
> Fame runs before him as the morning star,
> And shouts of joy salute him from afar * (*Lines* 731-34)

Then there is the prortrait of the King himself. History tells us that Charles II was a man of loose morals and that he was very lavish in spending money. He had many mistresses and produced several bastard children. His financial stringency always compelled him to turn to Louis XIV, King of France, for help. This is how a historian describes Charles II: "Charles II had not the noble, sorrowful face of his father; his heavy, sensuous lips, his sturdy nose and laughing eyes were reminiscent rather of his grand-father, Henry IV of France. From him he inherited his gaiety, his wit, and his taste for women.....His ministers seeking him on state business would find him playing with his dogs or fondling his mistresses.....London gave him a warm welcome, with flowers and carpets in the streets, peals of bells, fountains of wine.....In his train he brought back a beautiful mistress, Barbara Palmer, and in her company he spent his first night in Whitehall. Ere long he lived surrounded by a veritable seraglio,† and court morals imitated the King's." In his poem, Dryden takes due notice of Charles II's amours, but his treatment of this aspect of the King's character is witty and flippant so that the King's conduct does not seem to a reader to be very reprehensible. The King's sexual exploits are depicted as belonging to a period when polygamy had not yet been made a sin and when there were no laws forbidding a "promiscuous use of concubine and bride." The King's producing a number of bastard children is also treated non-seriously and almost impiously, because Dryden did not want that the reader should form a low opinion about the King's character. Accordingly, Dryden thus states the position : "and, wide as his command,/Scattered his maker's image through the land." Dryden is over-indulgent in his treatment of the King's loose morals for obvious reasons. He was in the pay of the King and he was writing a propaganda poem to exalt the King. Thus Dryden's portrayal of the King is partial,

* For Dryden's close adherence to historical facts here, see Macaulay's sketch of the Duke of Monmouth, as quoted in Chapter 6 of this book.

† *seraglio*—harem; mistresses and concubines.

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not realistic. The King's chronic shortage of money is thus expressed by Shaftesbury when he speaks to Monmouth :

> The thrifty Sanhedrin shall keep him poor;
> And every shekel which he can receive
> Shall cost a limb of his prerogative (*Lines* 390-91)

The Duke of Monmouth, in his speech to his countrymen, thus describes his father's character :

> My father, whom with reverence yet I name,
> Charmed into ease, is careless of his fame,
> And, bribed with petty sums of foreign gold,
> Is grown in Bathsheba's embraces old. (*Lines* 707-10).

"Duchess of Portsmouth"

This is a more or less correct picture of Charles II who was constantly borrowing money from the French King and who, at the particular time to which these lines refer, was amusing himself with the Duchess of Portsmouth (here called Bathsheba). Incidentally, Shaftesbury in his first speech correctly describes the reception that was given to Charles II when, returning from his exile, he landed on Dover Beach amid scenes of wild public enthusiasm :

> He is not now as when on Jordan's sand
> The joyful people thronged to see him land,
> Covering the Beach, and blackening all the Strand.
> (*Lines* 270-2).

Finally, the substance of the King's speech (*Lines* 939-1025) is more or less the same as that of *His Majesty's Declaration Regarding the Dissolution of the Two Last Parliaments* (April, 1681), in which the King had made a successful appeal to the country by publishing his reasons for twice dissolving the Parliament.

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Dryden did not make the king's character seem reprehensible. He was on the pay rolls of the King and, as such, he was writing a propaganda poem to exalt the King-

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It has been rightly said that it was Dryden's need for money which pushed him into the domain of Political Propaganda.

8

"Absalom And Achitophel"—A Political Pamphlet And A Work Of Art

1678 saw beginning of Paper war fare in England. 'Spanish Friar' anti-Catholic & anti-Whig.

It was the need of money which pushed Dryden into the domain of political propaganda. Since 1678 a furious paper warfare had been raging in England. Pamphlets and books written by both Tory and Whig spokesmen had been appearing plentifully. Political periodicals began to appear and English party journalism, which still holds the field, was born. Dryden first appeared on the political scene with a play, *The Spanish Friar* which was in effect an anti-Catholic and anti-Whig satire. It proved an immediate success which was due to the fact that it was symptomatic of the fear and hatred of Roman Catholicism which stood discredited owing to the discovery of the alleged Popish Plot.

Political matters in England soon took an even more serious turn, and Dryden was called upon to help in his capacity of Historiographer Royal. He produced a prose-pamphlet called "His Majesty's Declaration defended in a letter to a friend; being an answer to a seditious pamphlet called a letter from a person of quality to his friend concerning the King's late declaration touching the reasons which moved him to dissolve the two last Parliaments at Westminster and Oxford."

Absolam and Achitophel appeared in 1681

But it was obviously not here that his real value lay. In prose propaganda he was easily excelled by others. Some of his patrons, who had influence with the King, showed a copy of *MacFlecknoe* to Charles so that in 1681 the King, himself asked Dryden to write a poem satirising the Whig party and particularly its leader, Shaftesbury. *Absalom and Achitophel* appeared in November, 1681, a few days before judgment was to be delivered in Shaftesbury's trial on charges of high treason.

Absalom and Achitophel was intended as a propaganda poem, and a propaganda poem it is. But it is also a consummate work of art, artifice and tact. In writing it Dryden was faced by several tricky problems. He had to please the King and, in order to do so,

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Dryden had not only to attack Kings enemies in Scurrilously but also to defend his friends Scurrilously

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he was not merely to lampoon the King's enmies but also to praise the King's friends. Moreover, one of the principal characters to be portrayed was the Duke of Monmouth, an illegitimate son of the King; he was the Whig candidate for the crown against the Roman Catholic Duke of York. But his father still loved him : there was the difficulty. He could not be subjected to an all-out attack; yet his actions were to be condemned. And there were other difficulties too.

Lines of the Poem are those of master Craftsman –

Absalom and Achitophel is without doubt a great poem; its lines are those of a master-craftsman. Of course it is difficult to decide exactly what *kind* of a poem it is. It is a series of pictures in which, though action is often hinted at, nothing really happens. There are touches of the epic and the narrative about it and it contains passages of undoubted satire. But it is neither wholly epic, nor satire, nor narrative. We could perhaps say that, artfully constructed for the purposes of an ephemeral political propaganda, it is a poem that cannot be classified.

The poem shows Dryden's superb judgment and wit in an abundant measure. Dryden does not make fuss and he does not fume. He makes every line and couplet *tell* and at the same time please the reader.

Cruile intelligently defends Kings immorality –

The poem begins most skilfully leading up to the fact that Monmouth was illegitimate. In order to excuse the King's seeming immorality, Dryden wittily sets his tale at a time "before polygamy was made a sin" (line 2) when "man on many multiplied his kind" (line 3), and it was commendable for a King to have sexual relations with wives and slaves alike and "scatter his Maker's image throughout the land" (line 9).

"Praises Duke of Monmouth"

Of this "numerous progeny" Absalom was the bravest and the most handsome. Absalom's war-like deeds are mentioned, and his faults, as well as his father's fondness for him (lines 17-42). Then the English people, rebellious by nature, are introduced :

(Rebellious nature of the King)

> The Jews, a headstrong, moody, murmuring race,
> As ever tried the extent and stretch of grace...
>
> (*Lines* 45-6)

A reference is made to their changeableness, and we are told how, after the death of Saul (Oliver Cromwell) and the retirement of foolish Ishbosheth (Richard Cromwell), they had brought back the banished David (Charles II) and now again wished to change the ruler (lines 47-68). But not *all* Israel (England) wanted another change; it was only the "factious crowd" that wanted it. The sober citizens "well knew the value of a peaceful reign" (lines 70) and looked backwards to the past events with a wise affright" (line 71).

(mentions that the people are in the habit of Changing their Kings after every twenty years)

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Next come the Jebusites (Roman Catholics) and the Popish Plot : "Bad in itself but represented worse" (line 109). The plot failed but it had a most dangerous consequence for it stirred up factions, and it enabled leaders, who felt themselves ignored or overlooked, to play upon public disorder and to oppose the power of the throne for their own selfishly ambitious ends.

At this point Dryden introduces his first and perhaps most famous character-sketch, that of Achitophel (Shaftesbury). And here is the epic, almost Miltonic touch. Dryden himself said that satire was undoubtedly a species of heroic poetry:

> Of these false Achitophel was first;
> A name to all succeeding ages curst..... (*Lines* 150-97)

It is with great care that Dryden in this character-sketch treads the line between the too personal and the too general. Achitophel is Shaftesbury, but he is also any politician of a certain type of any time. Apart from that, these words slide into the mind with that rightness and sense of illumination found in all great poetry. Indeed some lines are scarcely felt as satire, for the poetic effect outweighs the satiric intent:

> And all to leave what with his toil he won,
> To that unfeather'd two-legg'd thing, a son.....
> (*Lines* 169-72)

Dryden shows his cleverness not only as a political writer unwilling to go too far but also as a character-writer by praising Shaftesbury's work as Lord Chancellor:

> The statesman we abhor, but praise the judge.....
> Unbribed, unsought, the wretched to redress,
> Swift of dispatch, and easy of access.
> Oh, had he been content to serve the crown.....
> (*Lines* 187-97)

But Shaftesbury seized the opportunity of the Plot to stand "at bold defiance with his prince" (line 205), assisted, we are again informed, by the notorious fickleness of the people:

> For govern'd by the moon, the giddy Jews
> Tread the same track when she the prime renews;
> And, once in twenty years, their scribes record,
> By natural instinct they change their lord. (*Lines* 216-19)

Shaftesbury, who needs a chief, makes persuasive speeches to seduce Monmouth, appealing to him to head the rebels. In the course of this sly and cunning attempt, Shaftesbury dismisses the theory of the divine right of kings:

> And nobler is a limited command,
> Given by the love of all your native land,
> Than a successive title, long and dark,
> Drawn from the mouldy rolls of Noah's ark.
> (*Lines* 299-302)

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Monmouth cannot become King by Divine Right but by the acclaim of the People.

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Shaftesbury is suggesting that though Monmouth cannot be king by divine right, he can become king by the acclaim of the people. Monmouth is not unresponsive to shaftesbury's suggestions; and Dryden excuses him to some extent because he was "full of angel's metal in his frame," and "unwarily was led from virtue's ways" (lines 310, 311). But he does not yield to temptation immediately. He speaks of the king's mildness and of the Duke of York's right to the throne; but then Shaftesbury speaks again, and he is subtly introduced with the heightened, inverted, Miltonic words:

Him staggering so when hell's dire agent found.....(*Line* 373)

The suggestion of Shaftesbury's connections with the supernatural powers of evil serves to excuse Monmouth's ultimate surrender.

Dryden then considers the men of more moderate opinion who are nevertheless in favour of dislodging Charles II. Among them are the old Parliamentarians and, worst of all, the sects:

> A numerous host of dreaming saints succeed,
> Of the true old enthusiastic breed. (*Lines* 529-30)

But most of them, Dryden continues with an air of great fairness, are men who "think too little, and who talk too much....." (Lines 534-542). Then there were others, and among them some princes of the land. Chief amongst these was Zimri (the Duke of Buckingham): "A man so various, that he seemed to be/Not one, but all mankind's epitome....."(Lines 543-68). The character of Shaftesbury had been straightforwardly evil in the epic mode; Buckingham is from the first shown in a different, "lower" key, and eventually is openly made fun of through wit and epigram. This, too, exactly fitted Buckingham's individual position *vis-a-vis* the King. Subsequently Dryden thus commented on his sketch of Zimri: "The character of Zimri in my *Absalom and Achitophel* is, in my opinion, worth the whole poem; 'tis not bloody, but 'tis ridiculous enough; and he for whom it was intended was too witty to resent it as an injury. If I had railed, I might have suffered for it justly; but I managed my own work more happily, perhaps more dexterously. I avoided the mention of great crimes, and applied myself to the representing of blind sides, and little extravagancies: to which the wittier a man is, he is genrally the more obnoxious."

After Zimri comes a number of minor portraits including the famous Shimei (Slingsby Bethel, the Republican London magistrate), and Corah (Titus Oates). They are contemptuous—a mixture of irony, scorn and name-calling.

Before turning to the loyal characters, Dryden again refers to the foolishness of the English and then makes his great statement on the dangers of constitutional change : "Nor is the people's judgment always true.....,,(Lines 781-804). This was the maturity of Dryden's political thought.

Dryden wrote that people's judgement was not always true. It shows his maturity

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Turning to the men who were loyal to the King, Dryden names the chief of these as being the Duke of Ormonde ("Large was his wealth, but larger was his heart"). Jotham (Halifax) and Hushai (Hyde, Earl of Rochester) are others honourably mentioned. None of these characters, of course, can stand by the great Achitophel and Zimri—partly from the nature of things,* partly because, as Dryden admitted, he found it much easier to write severely than otherwise.

The poem ends with a versification of Charles's declaration of his reasons for dissolving the last two parliaments, and the optimistic couplet :

> Once more the God-like David was restored,
> And willing nations knew their lawful lord.
> (*Lines* 1030-31)

A commentator says : "This poem is the triumph of genius as distinguished from mere talent, for the verdict of those whom it delighted, as actors and spectators in the world which it mirrors, has been corroborated by the judgment of those to whom what is local and ephemeral in it has long ceased to be of interest. A party pamphlet in the hands of Regnier or Churchill,—a party pamphlet it would have remained, that and nothing more." That is to say, this party pamphlet is not just a party pamphlet but it is an immortal poem which has not lost its appeal even today. There can be no manner of doubt that this poem was intended as a party pamphlet or as a piece of political propaganda in favour of the King and against his enemies, the Whigs, with the Earl of Shaftesbury as their principal spokesman. Accordingly, the poem is replete with propaganda. The people of England are depicted here as being changeful, giddy, inconstant and disgruntled. ((Not satisfied with the same ruler for more than twenty years, they wanted Charles II to be removed from the throne.)) Not satisfied with the considerable freedom that they enjoyed, they wanted the freedom which savages enjoy in the state of nature. Of course, all the people were not so foolish as to hold such opinions. The sober part of the English population were free from such folly. It was only the "factious crowd" who adopted an unreasonable and irrational attitude towards kingship. The clergy are depicted as selfish and mercenary. The Earl of Shaftesbury (Achitophel), the Duke of Buckingham (Zimiri), Slingsby Bethel (Shimei), Titus Oates (Corah), and others are depicted as villains who were the leaders of the conspiracy against Charles II.

Apart from the propaganda against certain political personalities, there is a long passage (Lines 751-810) in which Dryden speaks for kingship and the *status quo*. Once a King has been appointed, says Dryden, he and his successors must be recognised as sovereign rulers. The monarch cannot be removed by the arbitrary will of the

* Satan is a more interesting figure than God in *Paradise Lost*.

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populace, because the judgment of the people is not always sound. It is very easy for a factious crowd to charge a king with being oppressive and tyrannical and thus try to depose him. Not only crowds but a parliament may be infected with this " public lunacy". It becomes binding on the people to obey their King, once a King has been installed, and it is not only binding upon those who instal the King but also upon their descendants even though their descendants did not have any share in the installation of the King. We all have to suffer the penalty imposed upon our ancestor, Adam, even though we had no share in the fault that he committed. All political blunders cause damage to a State, but the most dangerous blunder is a revolution which leads to the dismissal of a King. Such is the argument that Dryden develops in lines 751–810. The argument seems foolish to us today, but it was perfectly valid at the time this poem was written. We are living in times when the King no longer has any sanctity, when in fact no individual has any sanctity. This part of the poem, therefore, has no relevance today and has little appeal in our times. The King's speech which concludes the poem has, likewise, become out-of-date. The King says that he is entitled to rule on the strength of the law that constitutes the foundation of the State. The people, he argues, have no right to depose the ruling monarch. Even God cannot grant to the people all that they desire. Much less can a King do so. Decisions cannot be taken by the vote of the people. If votes were to decide an issue, a part might be shown as greater than the whole. His gentleness and kindness, says the King, have been misinterpreted as weakness and timidity. He yet has the power to defeat the rebels towards whom he has so far been lenient and forgiving. The King's arguments, too, are meaningless in our eyes today, but as propaganda in Dryden's own time, these lines had the desired effect.

What gives to the poem a permanent value is its various artistic qualities—characterisation or character-portrayal which still interests and entertains us, the aptness and felicity of word and phrase, the satirical thrusts and the laughter which they arouse, the biblical parallels, and the generalisations on human nature which lend to the poem both depth and weight.

Dryden gains several advantages by the use of the Old Testament story as the allegorical framework for his poem. He has written a mock-heroic poem on a biblical subject. Much of our enjoyment of the poem springs from an easy recognition of the historical personalities behind the biblical masks. Dryden's use of the Old Testament allegory achieves a curious, 3-dimensional effect by enabling him to show that it has all happened before, is happening now, and may well happen again. A part of Dryden's purpose is to point out that history repeats itself and that what was happening in his time was more or less a recurring pattern of events. Furthermore the frequent biblical allusions give the poem depth and

Three dimensional effect:
1. What has happened before:
2. is happening now:
3. may well happen again.

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perspective. Thus Absalom is a second Moses and a "cloudy pillar." He shows the "promised land" and is a young "Messiah". David appears to his people as God had appeared to Moses, and speaks with divine wrath :

> Law they require, let law then show her face;
> They could not be content to look on grace. (*Lines* 1006-7)

There are the false gods of the conflicting religious factions, gods of "stock, stone, or other homely pedigree", who are no better than the political shibboleth : "that Golden Calf, a state." Shimei's hypocrisy is shown by means of a parody of the Christian ideal; Shimei "loved his wicked neighbour as himself." Then there are a number of Miltonic allusions in the poem which link Dryden's poem with *Paradise Lost*. By this association with Milton's great epic, Dryden's poem gains not only in stature but in conviction and authority. The very temptation scene in Dryden's poem is closely linked with the temptation scene in *Paradise Lost*. Dryden's poem also contains a number of echoes from Shakespeare (from *Julius Ceasar, Troilus and Cressida,* and *The Merchant of Venice*).

Dryden's generalisations on human nature have a universal appeal. The portrait of Achitophel alone contains five aphorisms. Two or three of these may be quoted here :

(*i*) Great wits are sure to madness near allied
And thin partitions do their bounds divide. (*Lines* 163-4)

(*ii*) So easy still it proves in factious times
With public zeal to cancel private crimes. (*Lines* 180-1)

(*iii*) But wild Ambition loves to slide, not stand,
And Fortune's ice prefers to Virtue's land.
(*Lines* 199-200)

Such aphorisms help to keep the poem alive and give it a perennial topicality.

Then there are the unforgettable portraits of character, of which the portrait of Achitophel is the most powerful. Achitophel's portrait is a curious example of the way in which scathing satire may be written without humour. At no point does the portrait degenerate into mere lampoon. Achitophel is intellectually gifted and sagacious, but these talents are allied to a fundamentally unstable disposition in which only a thin partition divides the man's wit from madness. In drawing this portrait, Dryden gives due praise to Achitopel's integrity as a judge. The portrait of Zimri is likewise presented with a feeling of regret for the waste of natural abilities. There is no element of praise in this portrait, but Dryden has tried to see that his satire in this case does not carry too sharp an edge, with the result that Zimri is depicted as a harmless. if meddlesome, nobleman, playing at the game of politics which is

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beyond his skill. Zimri is not as formidable a figure as Achitophel: in fact, his irresponsibility makes him totally unfit to be a leader. Zimri's opinions are stiff, wrong, and of short duration; his estate is large but he squanders it on fools; in everything that he does he goes to the extreme. It is a most interesting portrait, though Dryden exaggerated its importance when he said that this portrait was worth the whole poem.

—o--o—

where the poem has no appeal to-day:

1. Divine Right of Kings
2. Kings claim that people have no right to rebellion —

This is to be remembered that at no point does this poem degenerate into a lampoon:

Shafesbury is intellectually gifted and sagacious but these talents are allied to a fundamentally unstable disposition in which only a thin partition divides the man's wit from madness.

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9

The Kinship of "Absalom and Achitophel" With Heroic Poetry

Although *Absalom and Achitophel* has always been regarded as a satire, the style in which it is written is not a wholly satiric idiom. Dryden's object in writing this poem was not merely to attack the enemies of the King, but to depict the whole constitutional position in a certain way. While the King's enemies are represented in an unfavourable light, his supporters are portrayed in terms of glowing praise. It was inevitable, therefore, that the idiom should not be the middle or low style of lampoon or the commonest sort of denigrating satire, but a basically heroic style, with occasional base details in the portraits of Shaftesbury's followers. Like an epic or a heroic play, this poem reperesents "Nature wrought up to a higher pitch"; as a natural consequence "the plot, the characters, the wit, the passion, the descriptions are all exalted above the level of common converse, as high as the imagination of the poet can carry them, with proportion to verisimility." The verse of *Absalom and Achitophel* is marked by what Dryden (in his Preface to *Religio Laici*) called "the smoothness, the numbers, and the turn of heroic poetry.* Instead of the radical enjambements and feminine rhymes common in the lower species of poetry, one finds dignified verse which rises, as occasion offers, to that "long majestic march and energy divine" for which Pope gave Dryden such well-deserved praise.

What Dryden did in respect of the style of this poem was to perfect a new heroic idiom. He chose his words as much for their music as their meaning: "sounding words" is a frequent phrase throughout his criticism. He was helped by his long practice in the writing of dramas, and by his life-long familiarity with the music of Virgil's verse. The result was a heroic idiom of remarkable brilliance:

> Or that his conscious destiny made way
> By manly beauty to imperial sway. (*Lines* 21-2)

The elevation of the style is most evident when a speech is to be

* From Dryden's description of a serious play, *Essays*, (*i*). His dramatic experience helped to define Dryden's conception of "high style."

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introduced and Dryden remembers the classical poets and their modern imitators :

> Him he attempts with studied arts to please
> And sheds his venom in such words as these.

Once or twice, as in the Miltonic description of the Temptation, the unusual arrangement of the words marks the style as heroic :

> Him staggering so when Hell's dire agent found,
> While fainting virtue scarce maintain'd her ground,
> He pours fresh forces in, and thus replies. (*Lines* 373-5)

Of course, the idiom of the whole poem is not uniformly elevated. When such characters as Corah and Shimei are described, the style is necessarily lowered. Yet it remains true that the basis of the poem is heroic.

The imagery of the poem clearly supports this view. There are relatively few metaphors and similes in *Absalom and Achitophel*, and practically none whose primary function is to be witty. Striking images occur where they are appropriate with the object of amplifying the poet's meaning or making it more emphatic. An elaborate simile is used, for example, to emphasise the effects of the plot :

> This Plot, which fail'd for want of common sense,
> Had yet a deep and dangerous consequence ;
> For as, when raging fevers boil the blood
> The standing Lake soon floats into a Flood ;
> And ev'ry hostile humour which before
> Slept quiet in its channels bubbles o'er :
> So, several factions from this first ferment
> Work up to foam, and threat the government.
> (*Lines* 134-41)

The poet does not indulge in the youthful affectation of spicing elevated verse with indecorous conceits of wit. The narrative parts of the poem have a manly directness which would be spoilt by a profusion of witty images.

The kinship of *Absalom and Achitophel* with heroic poetry is particularly to be seen in the five speeches, which may be compared with those in classical epic and in *Paradise Lost*. The brilliance of these speeches as examples of forensic oratory is worthy of the highest praise*: they are every bit as good as the famous portraits of character. Achitophel's first speech to Absalom is a fair specimen. It begins with flattery, and passes to cunning temptations to betrayal of his father. The imagery is perfectly adapted to the purposses of courtly oratory :

> Believe me, Royal Youth, thy fruit must be
> Or gather'd ripe, or rot upon the tree.

* The speech from the throne is a necessary exception. It is no more dramatic than the speeches of the Miltonic Deity.

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Have'n has to all allotted, soon or late
Some lucky revolution of their fate.....(*Lines* 250-61).

Even more brilliant is the speech which is made by Absalom to the crowd :

I mourn, my countrymen, your lost estate,
Though far unable to prevent your fate :
Behold a banish'd man, for your dear cause
Expos'd a prey to arbitrary laws ! .....(*Lines* 698-722).

The magnificent hypocrisy of these lines is as brilliant as anything in Dryden's work. It is as skilful a use of the traditional art of oratory as Antony's speech to the Roman mob in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. The style is simple and direct, and suits the speaker, the subject, and the circumstances ; yet each line is as effective as a blacksmith's blow on softened steel.

It was in his long "Varronian satire," *Absalom and Achitophel*, that Dryden came nearest to achieving his ambition of writing a heroic poem; and it is largely to characteristics similar to thoes of heroic poety that the poem owes its supremacy amongst the political satires written in the English language. Dryden was an admirer of Juvenal, and this admiration was another reason why Dryden chose the heroic idiom for his great satire. Contemporary critics contrasted the "comical" style of Horatian satire with Juvenal's "tragical manner". Each of the characteristics* of Juvenalian satire which Dryden singles out for praise proclaims its kinship with epic. It was of this dignified kind of satire that Dryden was thinking when he called satire a species of heroic poetry.

The importance attached by Renaissance critics to the moral of a heroic poem helps further to explain the relationship between *Absalom and Achitopel* and heroic verse. An epic did not tell a story for its own sake ; it was essentially a patriotic and didactic composition. "The epic poem is a discourse invented by art, to form the manners, by such instructions as are disguised under the allegories of some one important action, which is related in verse, after a probable, diverting and surprising manner."—(*Le Bossu*). This description fits *Absalom and Achitophel* very well.

Yet the structure of *Absalom and Achitophel* has little in common with that of a heroic poem; and even for a " historical" poem it is unsatisfactory. In the preface, Dryden writes : "The conclusion of the story, I purposely forbore to prosecute. The frame of it was cut out but for a picture to the waist; and if the the draught be so far true, tis as much as I designed." Although he was not at liberty to invent a conclusion to the action, however, the chief events of the affair down to the time of writing could have been woven into a more connected narrative than the poem offers.

* the thoughts much more elevated than those of Horace, the sonorous and noble expressions, and the more numerous verse.

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Except in the speeches there is practically no portrayal of character in action or of the development of character and motive. The narrative parts are scamped. Whatever purpose the hemistich in the following lines is supposed to serve, for example, it gives an impression of sheer off-handedness :

> Th' inhabitants of old Jerusalem
> Were Jebusites; the town so call'd from them;
> And theirs the native right--
> But when the chosen people grew more strong,
> The rightful cause at length became the wrong.
> (*Lines* 85-9).

(The half-lines in the poem may have been intended to serve as a foil to the passages which follow them, in which the poet exerts his greatest powers). Perhaps Dryden originally intended to compose fuller narrative, and then decided that the object of his writing was gained without any further additions.

The parts of the poem not concerned with characters or speeches tend rather to "discourse", or dignified moralising, than to narrative. *Sententiae* are more numerous than decorum prescribed for a heroic composition. They vary from a single couplet* through longer passages† to the sixty lines on Innovation (Lines 755-810) which constitute a didactic passage.

Although the ideal of the heroic poem played an important part in the conception of *Absalom and Achitophel,* it is evident that Dryden's main purpose is not narrative. His object is better indicated by the comparison with painting in the passage already quoted from the preface. The poem as a whole may be compared to a masterpiece of "historical painting" : It is written with the same purpose, that of pleasing its patron : and the canvas, which is a very large one, is crowded with figures, clearly divided into two opposing groups and painted in varying perspective. Above the head of the King hovers his "guardian angel" (Lines 853), while a serpent is hinted at by the feet of Shaftesbury. Each character is brilliantly portrayed in some suitable pose, as if on a canvas by Kneller But the whole work is more static than dynamic : action is rather implied than portrayed.

With the heroic basis of the poem is blended a strong element of wit. The wit of the opening lines is one of the reasons why the heroic idiom of the poem as a whole has often been overlooked.

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* But life can never be sincerely blest :
Heav'n punishes the bad, and proves the best. (*Lines* 43-4).

† So easy still it proves in factious times
With public zeal to cancel private crimes :
How safe is treason and how sacred ill,
Where none can sin against the people's will,
Where crowds can wink, and no offence be known,
Since in another's guilt they find their own. (*Lines* 180-5)

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A heroic narrative is expected to open with an invocation or some other dignified figure. *Absalom and Achitophel* opens simply :

> In pious times ere priest-craft did begin,
> Before Polygamy was made a sin;
> When man on many multipli'd his kind,
> Ere one to one was cursedly confin'd.....

Although the idiom here is not lacking in elevation, the ironical undertone is not what one expects in a heroic poem. Instead of beginning with an invocation or an exclamatory phrase or sentence, Dryden opens his poem with a witty Saturnian setting. To appreciate the rhetorical triumph of the passage, we must consider the difficulty which Dryden faced. The object of his poem was to praise the King and his party at the same time as he satirised the King's opponents. The idiom here chosen for the purpose was basically heroic. Yet it was essential to the presentation of his case to emphasise that Monmouth was the illegitimate son of the King. To have stated this in a straightforwardly elevated idiom would have seemed absurd. By a masterly stroke, Dryden passes the matter off wittily. Instead of loose morals, he attributes to the King the venerable habit of polygamy as practised by the Kings of the Old Testament. Dryden once remarked that he found he had "a soul congenial to" Chaucer's. He never wrote anything more Chaucerian than the opening lines of *Absalom and Achitophel*.

Witty poems can be written only for witty patrons. Dryden was a master in the art of pleasing. *Absalom and Achitophel* was deliberately written, as every line proclaims, to please the King. The King was known for his quickness in repartee and his fondness for broad allusions. It was because Charles was a witty man that Dryden was free to use for his poem a new alloy, a skilful blending of heroic eulogy, satire, discourse, and witty commentary. It is the brilliant wit of the poem that has acted as its supreme preservative.

Dryden called this poem a satire, and it is as a satire that the poem has always been regarded. Yet it has practically nothing in common with the classical *satura*, and has marked similarities to a heroic poem. It is the prominence of the element of attack in the poem that makes it a satire in the English sense of the word.

The whole poem is a consummate example of the adaptation of means which have been perfectly mastered to the achievement of a clealy conceived end. The reader has every opportunity of observing the benefit to verse of the close relationship maintained in the Augustan age between the art of oratory and the art of poetry.

Dryden shows a remarkable skill in varying his treatment of the different characters who are depicted in the poem. His object is much more complex than that of the mere lampooner. The extent of a man's merit or guilt, the nature of Dryden's own relations with

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him, his social position and, above all, the degree of royal favour which he enjoyed—all these considerations determine Dryden's treatment of the various characters. The presentation of Absalom is a good example. In the preface Dryden writes : "The fault, on the right hand, is to extenuate, palliate, and indulge; and, to confess freely, I have endeavoured to commit it. Besides the respect which I owe his birth, I have a greater for his heroic virtues; and David himself could not be more tender of the young man's life than I would be of his reputation." As in the preface he emphasises that the most excellent natures are the soonest perverted by ill-counsels, so in the poem itself Dryden lays great emphasis on the cunning of Achitophel, and refrains from inventing a conclusion to the story which would show Absalom in an unfortunate condition. Not only this; he gives to Absalom some of the most brilliant lines of panegyric he ever wrote *. None of the members of the King's party receives such eloquent praise, although a proper meed of praise is allotted to each. These little portraits are skilfully done, although they lack the tremendous power with which the hostile characters have been delineated.

Dryden was under personal obligations to several persons of the King's party, and in the passage in a more exalted style which follows the characterisation of Barzillai (the Duke of Ormond) he repays one of his debts. In these lines, which form a brief funeral panegyric on the Duke's son, we find the usual characteristics of the genre—exclamations, sententiae, the heavenward flight of the soul, the fiction that the poet's life has ended with that of the dead man and so on. In a purely satirical poem, the presence of an elegiac passage would have a disturbing effect. But Dryden is as much concerned with panegyric as with satire : he wishes to praise the King's friends while he censures his enemies.

Like the royal party, Shaftesbury and his followers are introduced as characters in a heroic poem. With the possible exception of the cruel couplet about his son,† there is no trace of the "low" style in the description of Achitophel, as may be seen by comparing it with Pope's description of Sporus. And there is practically no ridicule. He does not say many of the witty and sarcastic things that he could have said about Shaftesbury. He is intent on portraying Achitophel as an evil man whose existence is a perpetual threat

* One of the main reasons for Dryden's choice of a predominantly heroic idiom for *Absalom and Achitophel* was the fact that panegyric played an important part in his plan. He emphasises Absalom's "goodly person" (after all he was the King's son). He describes his reception by the crowd as "their young Messiah" :

> From east to west his glories he displays :
> And, like the sun, the promised land surveys.
> Fame runs before him as the morning-star,
> And shouts of joy salute him from afar : (*Lines* 731-4)

† Shaftesbury's son is described as an "unfeathered, two-legged thing", and is further described as having been "born a shapeless lump, like anarchy."

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to the safety of the State. At several points a parallel is suggested between Shaftesbury's temptation of Monrnouth and the Fall of Man, with Charles himself in the background as the representative of the Deity. In the preface, Dryden observes : "Tis no more a wonder that Absalom withstood not the temptations of Achitophel, than it was for Adam not to have resisted the two devils, the serpent and the woman." He follows the lead of a hundred Tory preachers and pamphleteers in describing Shaftesbury as "hell's dire agent", the Satan of the plot, "a name to all succeeding ages cursed." The description of Achitophel shows that satire can exist without humour.

The portrayal of the Duke of Buckingham is differently handled. Whereas Achitophel is essentially a picture of an individual, and only secondarily a representation of ruthless ambition, the character of Zimri is general rather than particular. It also differs from the satire on Shaftesbury in its inclusion of humour as an ingredient. Dryden was anxious to avoid giving mortal offence to Buckingham and, in depicting him, he seems to have tried to make good his claim to prevent his satire from carrying too sharp an edge. Yet Dryden claims for Zimri a subtlety and indirectness which cannot be justified. The ridicule is direct. The style, inevitably, is slightly lowered, as is emphasized by the presence of two pairs of feminine rhymes.

Serious scorn distinguishes the characters of Shimei and Corah from that of Zimri. Some degree of humour marks them off even more clearly from the unsmiling condemnation of Achitophel. It is not because they are censured any less decidedly, but because commoners cannot be as dangerous to the nation as noblemen, that there is a contemptuous humour in the lines portraying Slingsby Bethel and Titus Oates, which is completely absent from the description of Shaftesbury. The character of Shimei begins with explicit and emphatic disapproval :

> But he, though bad, is follow'd by a worse,
> The wretch, who heav'n's anointed dar'd to curse
> (*Lines* 583-4)

The effect of the irony which runs through the whole portrait, however, varies from pure scorn to scornful ridicule :

> Shimei, whose youth did early promise bring
> Of zeal to God, and hatred to his King;
> Did wisely from expensive sins refrain,
> And never broke the Sabbath, but for gain.....
> Chaste were his cellars; and his shrieval board
> The grossness of a city feast abhorr'd :
> His cooks, with long disuse their trade forgot;
> Cool was his kitchen, though his brains were hot
> (*Lines* 585-8; 618-21)

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The portrait of Corah, that "monumental brass", is a similar compound of direct name-calling and devastating irony :

> Sunk were his eyes, his voice was harsh and loud,
> Sure signs he neither choleric was nor proud.
> (*Lines* 646-7)

It is noteworthy that such irony as may be found in the hostile characters of the poem is practically always directed at religious non-conformists, whether Catholics or sectarians (for instance, lines 100-7, 118-23, 128-9).

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10

"Absalom and Achitophel"— A Gallery of Portraits★

Absalom and Achitophel has justly been called a gallery of portraits. In fact, one of the elements that lend a perennial interest to this poem is Dryden's characterization of a number of historical personalities. The Popish Plot, the intrigues of Whigs and Tories, the religious bigotry of the time, the question of succession to the throne, the conflict of the King with the Parliament—these are of little interest to us today. But the portrayal of characters, with all its pungency of wit and satire, has a never-ending appeal.

The celebrated gallery of portraits offers two groups—the disgruntled ones or "the mal-contents", and the "faithful band of worthies". The main target, Achitophel, occupies Dryden for about a quarter of the poem (if we include his speeches and the comments on him); and his portrait (Lines 150-229) is mainly a moral attack, in the heroic "high style", with little humour. He is too dangerous to be belittled by vulgar jibes. He is essentially evil, violent, changeable, as Dryden insists with his piercing analysis of the deep-seated defects of his victim. What Dryden gives us is a moral portrait, enlivened by images which degrade Achitophel without reducing his potential for evil :

> He stood at bold defiance with his prince :
> Held up the buckler of the people's cause,
> Against the crown; and skulked behind the laws
> (*Lines* 205-7).

The Duke of Buckingham (denoted by Zimri) had been a close friend of Charles II, and his chief minister, before siding with Monmouth. He had ridiculed Dryden in *The Researsal* (1671). Like Shaftesbury, he is depicted as having real talents, but as being meddlesome rather than dangerous, for he wastes his energies in a frenzy of interests—politics, chemistry, writing, sexual intrigue—squandering wit, wealth and life in the vain pursuit of pleasure :

> A man so various that he seemed to be
> Not one, but all mankind's epitome.

★ See also the Chapter : Satire in '*Absalom and Achitophel*.'

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Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong;
Was everything by starts, and nothing long.
But, in the course of one revolving moon,
Was chemist, fiddler, statesman, and buffoon :
Then all for women, painting, rhyming, drinking;
Besides ten thousand freaks that died in thinking
(*Lines* 545-52)

Here the wit predominates because Zimri can be dismissed as a political dabbler. Dryden himself called this style "fine raillery" and compared it to the "stroke that separates the head from the body, and leaves it standing in its place." Indeed he thought his portrait of Zimri "worth the whole poem", but that is an exaggeration.

In depicting commoners, Dryden appears ready to descend in style from fine raillery to derision and abuse. Shimei (Slingsby Bethel, sheriff of London) is ruled by his trading interests, which dominate even his pretended piety.

Shimei, whose youth did early promise bring
Of zeal to God, and hatred to his king;
Did wisely from expensive sins refrain :
And never broke the Sabbath, but for gain. (*Lines* 585-8)

There follow detailed accusations of hypocrisy, seditious talk, prejudiced juries, pamphleteering—all the low tricks employed by the King's enemies. Similarly, Corah (Titus Oates) becomes the target of withering contempt and personal abuse :

Sunk were his eyes, his voice was harsh and loud,
Sure signs he neither choleric was nor proud :
His long chin proved his wit; his saint-like grace
A church vermilion, and a Moses' face;
His memory, miraculously great,
Could plots, exceeding man's belief, repeat;
Which, therefore, cannot be accounted lies,
For human wit could never such devise. (*Lines* 646-53).

The rest of the portrait depends too much on biblical allusions to have any direct appeal today; and neither the humour nor the abuse finds memorable expression.

The poem does not contain a specific character-sketch of Absalom (the Duke of Monmouth). Instead Dryden rather ingeniously praises Monmouth as a likable young man, manipulated by others, but allows him to reveal his rashness and ambition in his speeches. This is another example of his tact, and possibly he hoped Monmouth might be induced to reject Whig efforts to woo him. About him Dryden carefully says : " 'Tis juster to lament him than accuse." He does allow Monmouth to state current Whig criticism of Charles II in the reference to the French and Dutch trading

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competition, the Roman Catholic influence at court, the King's laziness, his acceptance of French bribes, his fondness for his mistress (the Duchess of Portsmouth); and it is even possible that Dryden agreed with this criticism, but it is noteworthy that there is no fundamental accusation that the King is an arbitrary tyrant. At this point, Dryden steps forward and delivers his most effective blows against those who would rebel against monarchs, sole guarantors of law, public order, and private property. The fear of mob tyranny and radical changes is here expressed with resounding eloquence (Lines 779-808). This dignified and powerful plea for conservatism illustrates Dryden's capacity to write in a persuasive manner. However, one could retort that the State is not like a building. It can be radically altered without being destroyed. Indeed, Dryden lived to see this happen in the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

Instead of plot or action, the poem provides us with Achitophel's long speeches, tempting Absalom to rebel, and the final scene when the King speaks and asserts his authority. Achitophel's rhetoric is dazzling, and was composed by Dryden to suggest Shaftesbury's skill in argument, while at the same time clearly revealing the cunning schemer at work. Here, for example, Achitophel's own words depict for the reader the shady tactics of the Whigs and Parliament (Sanhedrin) against the generous King :

> Let him give on till he can give no more,
> The thrifty Sanhedrin shall keep him poor
> And every shekel which he can receive,
> Shall cost a limb of his prerogative.
> To ply him with new plots, shall be my care,
> Or plunge him deep in some expensive war (*Lines* 389-94)

In direct contrast to the tortuous reasoning, flattery, and oily persuasion of Achitophel, the speech by King David shows a tone of confident finality. He extends mercy to Absalom, threatens his enemies with justifiable punishment, and defends monarchical rule with vigour and satirical humour (Lines 945-92). Throughout this scene, King David is presented as a "god-like" figure, and his speech is "by heaven inspired". When he has finished, God is at hand to give his divine sanction :

> He said. The Almighty, nodding, gave consent;
> And peals of thunder shook the firmament
> (*Lines* 1026-7).

A critic writes : "But the poem has not a genuine *action*, and it is in the individual character-sketches that Dryden achieves most. First, of Shaftesbury himself. 'Of these the false Achitophel was first.....And over-informed the tenement of clay', in which a figure simply described in moral terms is created concrete, positive, enough to survive as a character in the poem by the sheer precision of the language, the energy, the capability of the words. Without

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such positive emergence, satiric comment on actual persons will rapidly fade to something of interest only as a record, hardly to bie revivified by even the fullest explanatory footnote. Giving thes terse sketch added life and increased value is its acknowledge mnt of the powers of Shaftesbury, an admiration for them, and, even so early in the portrait, the beginnings of a distinct personal feeling of regret at the perverrion and waste of talents; particularly when they are turned to the upsetting of that 'common quiet' which, as he says in *Religio Laici*, is 'mankind's concern'. The humanizing sense fo regret gets plain statement soon after : 'O, had he been content ot serve the crown', etc., etc.

Dryden's attitude varies from character to character, of course, and with it his methods of presentation. Zimri (Buckingham) receives a much tarter treatment : 'A man so various, that he seemed to be.....died in thinking'. 'Nothing long', though '*always* in the wrong'; the insinuation in 'revolving moon'; the juxtaposing of 'chemist', 'fiddler', 'statesman', and so on. There is not so much respect here, but there is a trace of pity.

Shimei (Bethel, Sheriff of London), a very fourth-rate personage is created by a brilliant comic use of a kind of bathos : 'Shimei, whose early youth did promise bring.....His neck was loaded with a chain of gold'. It is remarkable how 'loaded' is given both physical and moral weight, and Dryden relentlessly resumes the account : 'For Shimei, tho' not prodigal of pelf.....'.

In the depiction of Corah (Titus Oates), to aid in the effect of sheer contemptibility, he employs a direct insulting language—though wittily embodied in a play of word and idea—and finally drops to rough physical description (in lines which provide one of his strikingly few reminders of Chaucer), and what in contrast with the other sketches is not far from mere abuse takes on something of a positive character".

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Satire is an exposition of vice or folly by indignation —
lofty denunciation of the wickedness of an age to scornful reflection upon the defects of an individual and equally includes lengthy and elaborated compositions in verse or prose

11

Satire In "Absalom and Achitophel"

(Wit, Humour, Raillery, Denunciation in *Absalom and Achitophel*)

Satire is the exposure of vice or folly prompted by indignation. As such, it ranges from lofty denunciation of the wickedness of an age to scornful reflection upon the defects of an individual, and equally includes lengthy and elaborated compositions in verse or prose, and the sententious brevity of an epigram. All passions come within its purview, but its concern is with the abuse of these, and its function is destructive criticism. As a picture of living manners, satire has enduring interest, but as a substantive form of literary art it is marred by its essential uniformity of censure.

(origin Italy)

Satire found its most congenial soil in ancient Italy. Originating in the crude drama of the peasantry, it was given regular poetic form by Ennius (239-169 B.C.), and later was cultivated to a high degree of perfection by Lucilius (180-102 B.C.), Horace (65-8 B.C.), Persius (A.D.34-62), and Juvenal (A.D. 60-130). Writing in the orthodox hexameter form, these men produced vigorous pictures of contemporary life, each stamping his work with his own character. They set, moreover, what was to remain the standard of classic satiric verse, in conformity with which poets of different blood and later ages were to produce didactic poetry of high dignity and moral usefulness, its splendid scorn of vice and folly emphasised by the pungent brevity of its expression.

Martial, Lucian, and Petronius Arbiter made substantive contributions to the material form of satire, the first by epigrams, the second by dramatic dialogues, the third by licentious fiction describing the corrupt pleasures of an effete society. These had their disciples and imitators in later days, but generally the unworthier qualities of their work were most commonly reproduced.

Nevertheless, satire has had its triumphs in the literature of every country. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were its flowering time in Europe. Then, as Pope put it, wit grew polite; poets learned to preserve freedom and forbear vice; and satire rose to hit the happy medium and heal with morals what it hurt with wit. In England, Pope himself, with Dryden and Swift, and, before them, Donne; in France, Boileau, Moliere, and Voltaire; in Spain,

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In true and virtuous Satirists nothing was so hateful to them as hypocracy.

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Cervantes; and in Germany, Richter and, later, Heine; these men are true satirists, truly virtuous in that nothing was so hateful to them as hypocrisy, and true poets in that they ennobled invective into allegory. (Greatest Political Satire in English)

Absalom and Achitophel is the greatest political satire in English verse. Several political personalities are the targets of Dryden's shafts of satire. First of all, Dryden heaps contempt and ridicule upon Shaftesbury, the politician. According to Dryden's sketch, Shaftesbury was a clever schemer and an unscrupulous intriguer. He had no principles and his lust for power was limitless. He had a weak, pigmy body, but a stormy soul. Dauntless in danger, he was utterly unfit for times of peace and stability. He was so foolish that he denied himself the needful rest in his old age in order to continue his wrongful political activities. He was false in friendship and merciless in his enmities. He wanted to rule the country and, if he could not achieve this object, he was prepared to ruin the nation. He violated the Triple Alliance and prepared England for slavery by instigating the war against Holland. He tried to hide his political misdeeds under the cloak of patriotism.

Negative side of his character

Dryden denounces Shaftesbury, employing keen arrows of criticism. To say that Shaftesbury was undaunted in times of a crisis but totally unfit for times of peace, is a scathing attack on him. This is followed by another attack when Dryden says, with reference to Shaftesbury, that the boundary line between genius and madness is very thin. Satire becomes more pungent when we are told that Shaftesbury's fiery soul consumed his weak body by its very turbulence. But, perhaps, the most biting lines are those where a reference is made to shaftesbury's son: "that unfeathered, two-legged thing, born a shapeless lump, like anarchy." It may be pointed out that the element of abuse in Dryden's sketch of Shaftesbury is more marked than the vein of humour or ridicule. Dryden is a master of contempt and this passage illustrates it. "A name to all succeeding ages cursed"; "For close designs and crooked counsels fit"; "unfixed in principles and place"; "In friendship false, implacable in hate"—such lines are full of abuse and contempt and have very little humour. The tone of these lines is almost violent.

Positive Side of character

Despite his bitter condemnation of Shaftesbury, Dryden pays a tribute to his magisterial qualities. Shaftesbury is shown as having been an honest, incorruptible, efficient, conscientious, and fair judge. Such high praise in a denunciatory character-sketch has been explained in different ways. Perhaps Dryden wishes to seem impartial so that his condemnation of Shaftesbury may become more credible: praise of the villain may serve as part of the rhetoric of persuasion. Also, a certain amount of praise is sometimes called for as part of the satirical convention, because praise emphasises the thing to be deplored. But there is another explanation of these words of praise. The lines containing

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praise of Shaftesbury as a judge were added to the poem after Shaftesbury had been acquitted of the charges against him.

Although guilty of wickedness and villainy, Shaftesbury has been depicted as being intellectually gifted. The portrait of a wicked man who is gifted, who is in fact a good man when he is not misussing his great talents, suggests that this man was also a fool. His wisdom turned to folly, indeed, in his restless, impatient, daring temper, and in the madness to which his great wit was allied when he overtaxed his weak body. After praising Shaftesbury's qualities as a judge, Dryden again criticises him by saying that, in the game of politics, he was a reckless gambler: "But wild ambition loves to slide, not stand,/And fortune's ice prefers to virtue's land."

(*Lines* 198-9).

Shaftesbury's body, we are told, was too weak to sustain the constant intellectual and emotional effort brought on by his ambition and his recklessness. The weakness of his body was an additional reason why he should have controlled his imagination, his ambition, and his intellect. He was thus a fool in not controlling himself better, and so the famous lines on the alliance of great wit and madness deplore his folly. If he was so unreasonable as to ignore his own health, how much greater would have been the danger of his folly if he had been entrusted with the responsibility of ruling the country?

Another personality of the times dealt with is the Duke of Buckingham. The name of Zimri in the Bible has many unpleasant associations of restlessness, sexual intrigue, and treasonable conspiracy. Dryden has depicted Zimri, or the Duke of Buckingham, in a most amusing manner. Indeed, his gifts of irony and sarcasm are nowhere employed with a better effect than here. Dryden was of the opinion that his sketch of the Duke of Buckingham was worth the whole poem. This was, of course, an exaggerated view, but there is no doubt about the brilliance of this portrait and its witty quality. Zimri, we are told, was so various that he seemed to be not one, but all mankind's epitome. He was stiff in opinions, and always in the wrong. He changed his ideas as also his hobbies and occupations. In the course of one single month he showed himself by turns as an alchemist, a fiddler, a statesman, and a buffoon. He showed a great interest in women, painting, rhyming, and drinking. He was a madman who tried to employ every hour of his life with something new to enjoy. His usual themes were praising some and condemning others, and in both these he went to extremes. He had a peculiar aptitude for squandering wealth. Even fools could rob him of money. Having incurred the displeasure of the King, he tried to find comfort in forming parties, but he could never become the leader of any party. There is very little of abuse in this satirical sketch. Dryden depicts Zimri more as a fool than as a knave. If Zimri was "fiddler, statesman, and buffoon", what kind of states-

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Zimri (Duke of Buckingham) is an excellent example of Dryden's talent for raillery.

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man must he be who was a statesman only between being a fiddler and a buffoon? In just twentysix lines, Dryden gives us a picture of variety, extremity, instability, and folly, of unresolved contradictions becoming mere ridiculous futility at last. The "blest madman" of Line 553 is clearly seen in his ten thousand freakish thoughts, in his hourly search for what is new, in his contradictory pursuit of opposites, in his violent rushing to all extremes, in the squandering of his wealth, in his silly jokes, and in his forming parties or factions that went beyond his control. Zimri does not, like Achitophel, possess the qualities of a gifted scoundrel; he cannot lead any enterprise, not even a wrong one. Zimri is merely futile. The portrait of Zimri is an excellent example of Dryden's talent for raillery.

A noteworthy feature of this character-sketch is that it ends with a fine couplet, employing alliteration, balance, antithesis, (and, of course, rhyme), all seeming to show that something has been proved once and for all (Lines 567-8). From Line 545 to Line 555, again, neither Zimri's own name nor any pronoun for him is used, but the nouns, participles and epithets are allowed to accumulate upon his unfortunate head. He is casually demolished with the aid of the moon and madness. In Lines 569-582, Dryden tells us that he considers it tedious and undignified to mention some of the rebels who were individuals of no special note. These included lords, wits, warriors, Puritan sympathisers. And then Dryden makes satirical references to Hastings, Grey, Howard, and Sir William Jones, with the multitude ("the rascal rebel") thrown in. In mentioning such persons, Dryden refers to their dullness, talkativeness, lechery, hypocrisy, and illegality. Here, again, we have more of contempt or abuse than of wit or humour. We then meet Shimei (Slingsby Bethel), whose portrait begins with a most skilful opening rhyme, Lines 583-4, that impales him on his own curse. Dryden makes a brilliant use of the satiric possibilities of the heroic couplet for anti-climax and clash of opposites. The balance, hesitation, and surprise in these lines (583-629) reveal something to be condemned through the construction of lines and couplets that set up the anti-climaxes showing the man as odious. After the opening curse, Shimei's zeal, wisdom, and piety are only the visible signs of what in fact becomes hatred, cunning and blasphemy. Shimei's zeal to God is immediately followed by *hatred to his King*. He never broke the Sabbath, *but for gain*. He never uttered an oath or a curse, unless it was *against the government*. He accumulated wealth by the most ready way, *which was to cheat and pray*. In his hand he held the wand of justice, but *his neck was loaded with a chain of gold*. He was a persuasive writer, and he tried to persuade the people *that Kings were useless*. In all these cases, the italicised phrases or sentences come like an anti-climax. We are led each time to hope that there is some good in the man, but each time we find a surprise waiting for us. His greed and his miserliness are especially emphasised. His cooks, with long disuse, had forgotten their skill, his

In his hand he held the wand of justice, but his neck was loaded with a chain of gold.

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kitchen was always cold; and he fed his servants on spiritual food. We are greatly amused when we are told that he respected Moses all the more because Moses did not eat or drink for forty days. Unlike Achitophel, who was an incorruptible magistrate, Shimei used his office to pervert the aims of law and justice he had sworn to uphold (Lines 610-11). His personal abstemiousness is not a virtue but only another function of his avarice. "From seeming formidable as a threat to order, he grows cheap and mean, with something pinched and meagre, in all ways except impiety and rebellion. He shows at last the invariable selfishness of all dangerous men.

The portrait of Corah (Titus Oates) is the most scornful and contemptuous of all. Corah is described as "monumental brass" with reference to his extreme arrogance and haughtiness. He is compared to the serpent of brass that was erected by Moses to save the lives of his followers from snake-bite. Corah's low birth is ridiculed. But what does it matter if Corah was a man of low birth? Corah was the son of a weaver but, says the author ironically, great actions may be performed as well by the son of a weaver as by the son of a King. Continuing the irony, the author says that, by performing one great deed for the public good, Corah ennobled all his blood. Corah is next described as one of "God Almighty's gentlemen". Corah had sunken eyes, and a voice that was harsh and loud. These were sure signs that he was neither choleric nor proud. Here, again, the author is mocking at Corah because sunken eyes and a harsh voice are in reality indicative of pride and ill-temper. His long chin was a sign of his wit. This is another ironical remark. His ruddy complexion had a brightness like the brightness which irradiated the face of Moses when he came down from Mount Sinai. This is, again, an ironical comparison. Corah had a remarkable memory capable of repeating plots which nobody could believe. Where he could not speak as a witness of facts in the present, he spoke as a prophet of future truths. (Yet another ironical statement). God alone knows how he claimed to have received the degree of Doctor of Divinity. He had the capacity to put together different pieces of evidence so well that they could not be disbelieved. His religious zeal made him despise the King and heap insults on him. Corah was most probably responsible for having instigated the murder of Sir Edmund Godfrey. He tried to procure as many witnesses of the Popish Plot as he could get by love or money. The portrait of Corah, though not witty like that of Zimri, is certainly amusing especially the lines about his low birth, his physical appearance, his ruddy complexion, his claim to a foreign degree, etc. But we get a merciless exposure of a false, scheming, fraudulent, and hypocritical man. Corah has been depicted as the most odious and despicable in a large crowd of fools and scoundrels. Achitophel is much the most formidable of the leaders, with Zimri more subject to ridicule in his futility. Shimei's personal stinginess is enough to show him as small and mean. Dryden

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here makes use of one of the standard objects of ridicule). But Corah's lines are the most disrespectful and abusive in the poem, seemingly directed more at an actual contemporary than the other portraits, including more specific details of personal appearance than any other, and bringing him down to the commonest possible level.

All references to Corah's talents are sarcastic, except his talent for lies. His "monumental brass" recalls the brazen serpent of Moses that saved the Israelites, as Corah would save England by the fantastic impudence of his lies. "Brass" here might also represent a brainless head. The sarcasm grows more bitter with reference to Corah's low birth. At the martyrdom of St. Stephen after testimony by false witnesses, no one inquired into the ancestry of those whose lies sent innocent men to their death : "Whoever asked the witnesses' high race/Whose oath with martrydom did Stephen grace ?" (Lines 642-3). In telling lies, Corah became prophetic, saw visions, and was so carried away in spirit as to imagine that he had obtained a doctor's degree. The lines are a bitter attack on the falsity of Corah, both as witness and inspired prophet. But Corah's judgment seems even more remarkable than his memory. It was equally suited to the times and the opportunities they offered. To his memory and judgment Corah adds religious zeal which not only inspires hostility against the King but permits Corah the right to instigate a murder (the murder of Sir Edmund Godfrey). But Corah's fate will be the same as that of all false witnesses has ever been. "His low-born impudence, his false pretence of public service, the enormous lies brought forward by his memory and judgment, the cynical exploitation of religious sanction for his own odious purposes—all must avail him nothing. He is redeemed by nothing, offers nothing to deplore, is totally wrong by every assumption that underlies the poem."

Corah's fate as that of other false witnesses

(Satire on English nation)

Dryden's satire does not spare the English people as a nation. In Lines 45-66, Dryden ridicules the English people for their fickle-mindedness, inconstancy, and perpetual discontent. He calls them a "headstrong, moody, murmuring race." No King could govern them, and no God could please them. They had tried gods of every shape and size, without deriving much satisfaction. They enjoyed ample freedom, but wanted more. In fact, they wanted the freedom which savages enjoy in a state of Nature. They were so giddy and changeful that having warmly welcomed Charles II as their King, they now felt that the King should be removed. In fact, they began to wonder why they had been obeying Charles II for such a long time. They had made him the King, and they wanted to unmake him also. All this is pungent satire. In Lines 214-19, Dryden again mocks at the English people for their inconstancy. These people, he says, were easy to rebel because they were governed by the moon which keeps changing (in shape). It was a natural tendency in the English people, the author adds, to change their

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King once in every twenty years : "For, governed by the moon, the giddy Jews/Tread the same track when she the prime renews."

The priests and clergymen also come in for their share of ridicule. The members of the ecclesiastical profession are depicted as self-seeking, mercenary, and hypocritical. Priests of all religions, says the author, are the same. In the defence of their gods, no matter what the ancestry of those gods might be, the priests will go to any length. After all, priests must stand by the cause which is the source of livelihood for them (Lines 99-107).

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PART II

TEXT WITH COMPLETE PARAPHRASE

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ABSALOM AND ACHITOPHEL

A POEM

"Si propius stes
Te capiat magis."

Horace, *Ars Poet* 361.

TO THE READER

'Tis not my intention to make an apology for my poem : some will think it needs no excuse, and others will receive none. The design, I am sure, is honest; but he who draws his pen for one party must expect to make enemies of the other. For wit and fool are consequents of Whig and Tory; and every man is a knave or an ass to the contrary side. There's a treasury of merits in the Fanatic church as well as in the Papist, and a pennyworth to be had of saintship, honesty, and poetry, for the lewd, the factious, and the blockheads; but the longest chapter in Deuteronomy has not curses enough for an Anti-Bromingham. My comfort is, their manifest prejudice to my cause will render their judgment of less authority against me. Yet if a poem have a genius, it will force its own reception in the world; for there is a sweetness in good verse, which tickles even while it hurts; and no man can be heartily angry with him who pleases him against his will. The commendation of adversaries is the greatest triumph of a writer, because it never comes unless extorted. But I can be satisfied on more easy terms: if I happen to please the more moderate sort, I shall be sure of an honest party and, in all probability, of the best judges; for the least concerned are commonly the least corrupt. And I confess I have laid in for those, by rebating the satire, where justice would allow it, from carrying too sharp an edge. They who can criticize so weakly as to imagine I have done my worst, may be convinced at their own cost that I can write severely with more ease than I can gently. I have but laughed at some men's follies, when I could have declaimed against their vices; and other men's virtues I have commended as freely as I have taxed their crimes. And now, if you are a malicious reader, I expect you should return upon me that I affect to be thought more impartial than I am; but if men are not to be judged by their professions, God forgive you commonwealth's-men for

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Adam could not resist the two devils — woman and the serpent.

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professing so plausibly for the government. You cannot be so unconscionable as to charge me for not subscribing of my name; for that would reflect too grossly upon your own party, who never dare, though they have the advantage of a jury to secure them. If you like not my poem, the fault may possibly be in my writing, though 'tis hard for an author to judge against himself, but more probably 'tis in your morals, which cannot bear the truth of it. The violent on both sides will condemn the character of Absalom, as either too favourably or too hardly drawn; but they are not the violent whom I desire to please. The fault on the right hand is to extenuate, palliate, and indulge; and, to confess freely, I have endeavoured to commit it. Besides the respect which I owe his birth, I have a greater for his heroic virtues; and David himself could not be more tender of the young man's life, than I would be of his reputation. But since the most excellent natures are always the most easy and, as being such, are the soonest perverted by ill counsels, especially when baited with fame and glory, it is no more a wonder that he withstood not the temptations of Achitophel than it was for Adam not to have resisted the two devils, the serpent and the woman. The conclusion of the story I purposely forebore to prosecute, because I could not obtain from myself to show Absalom unfortunate. The frame of it was cut out but for a picture to the waist; and if the draught be so far true, it is as much as I designed.

Were I the inventor, who am only the historian, I should certainly conclude the piece with the reconcilement of Absalom to David. And who knows but this may come to pass? Things were not brought to an extremity where I left the story: there seems yet to be room left for a composure; hereafter there may only be for pity. I have not so much as an uncharitable wish against Achitophel, but am content to be accused of a good-natured error, and to hope with Origen, that the Devil himself may at last be saved. For which reason, in this poem, he is neither brought to set his house in order, nor to dispose of his person afterwards as he in wisdom shall think fit. God is infinitely merciful; and his vicegerent is only not so, because he is not infinite.

The true end of satire is the amendment of vices by correction. And he who writes honestly is no more an enemy to the offender than the physician to the patient, when he prescribes harsh remedies to an inveterate disease; for those are only in order to prevent the chirurgeon's work of an *Ense rescindendum*, which I wish not to my very enemies. To conclude all: if the body politic have any analogy to the natural, in my weak judgment, an act of oblivion were as necessary in a hot distempered state as an opiate would be in a raging fever.

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ABSALOM AND ACHITOPHEL.

In pious times, ere priestcraft did begin,
Before polygamy was made a sin,
When man on many multiplied his kind,
Ere one to one was cursedly confined,
Then Israel's monarch after Heaven's own heart
His vigorous warmth did variously impart
To wives and slaves, and, wide as his command,
Scattered his Maker's image through the land.

Michal, of royal blood, the crown did wear,
A soil ungrateful to the tiller's care :
Not so the rest ; for several mothers bore
To god-like David several sons before.
But since like slaves his bed they did ascend,
No true succession could their seed attend.
Of all this numerous progeny was none
So beautiful, so brave, as Absalon :

For that his conscious destiny made way
By manly beauty to imperia sway.
Early in foreign fields he won renown
With kings and states allied to Israel's crown
In peace the thoughts of war he could remove
And seemed as he were only born for love.
Whate'er he did was done with so much ease,
In him alone 'twas natural to please ;
His motions all accompanied with grace,
And Paradise was opened in his face.

With secret joy indulgent David viewed
His youthful image in his son renewed ;
To all his wishes nothing he denied
And made the charming Annable his bride.
What faults he had (for who from faults is free ?)
His father could not or he would not see.
Some warm excesses, which the law forbore,
Were construed youth that purged by boiling o'er
And Amnon's murder by a specious name
Was called a just revenge for injured fame.

Thus praised and loved, the noble youth remained,
While David undisturbed in Sion reigned.

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Lines 1—10. Those were holy times when priests had not yet begun to exercise power over the people by means of their cunning. In those times it was not thought sinful to have more than one wife. The unjust and evil custom by which a man has to restrict himself to only one woman had not yet started, and a man was free to beget children by co-habiting with many women. Men in those days acted in accordance with natural desires and urges, and were not forbidden by any laws to have unrestrained sexual relations with many wives and mistresses. In those days the King of Israel* , in accordance with God's own wishes, contracted sexual relationships with many mistresses and slave girls, and begot many children over the entire wide area of the territory over which he ruled.

Lines 11—16. His wife, Catharine of Braganza, came of a royal family and wore the Queen's crown. She did not bear any child, and was therefore like a piece of land where no crop grows in spite of the efforts of the farmer. But such was not the case with other women with whom Charles had sexual relations. Several other women gave birth to several children by Charles who was the King by divine right. However, as these other women slept with Charles not as his lawfully wedded wives but as his mistresses or the slaves of his desire, their children were illegitimate and could not therefore be regarded as legal heirs to the throne.

Lines 17—42. Of Charles' numerous illegitimate children, none was as handsome and as brave as the Duke of Monmouth. It is possible that Charles, in begetting him, had been fired by a more sacred passion and therefore had shown a greater manliness in performing the deed. Or, perhaps, this young man was aware of his worth and he knew that he was destined to attain greatness. By his handsome appearance and his heroic quality, he rose to a position of royal command. Early in life he had fought in foreign battlefields in the service of England to support those countries (like Holland and France) whose monarchs were friends and allies of the English King; and he had earned fame by his gallantry. In times of peace, he could drive away all thoughts of war so that it seemed as if he were born only to spread feelings of brotherhood. Whatever he did was done with such a natural facility that it seemed that he alone was gifted with a natural temperament to please others. All his physical movements had a grace about them, and his face had the beauty of paradise (or, his face offered to an onlooker a view of paradise). With secret and loving joy, Charles looked at his own former youthful appearance reflected in this son of his. (Or, when Charles looked at this young man who reflected his own former youthful appearance, he felt secretly pleased, and he felt very fond of this son of his). Charles did not refuse any of the wishes of this son, and had him married to a charming bride, Anne Scott, Countess of Buccleuch. Whatever faults this young man had, (because no body is free from faults), his

* "Israel" here represents England. The King of Israel therefore refers to Charles II.

M.A. (Pol. Sc. Eco. Eng. Hist.)
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But life can never be sincerely blest ;
Heaven punishes the bad, and proves the best.
The Jews, a headstrong, moody, murmuring race
As ever tried the extent and stretch of grace ;
God's pampered people, whom, debauched with ease
No king could govern nor no God could please ;
Gods they had tried of every shape and size
That goldsmiths could produce or priests devise ;
These Adam-wits, too fortunately free,
Began to dream they wanted liberty ;
And when no rule, no precedent was found
Of men by laws less circumscribed and bound,
They led their wild desires to woods and caves
And thought that all but savages were slaves.
They who, when Saul was dead, without a blow
Made foolish Ishbosheth the crown forego ;
Who banished David did from Hebron bring,
And with a general shout proclaimed him King ;
Those very Jews who at their very best
Their humour more than loyalty exprest,
Now wondered why so long they had obeyed
An idol monarch which their hands had made
Thought they might ruin him they could create
Or melt him to that golden calf, a State.
But these were random bolts ; no formed design
Nor interest made the factious crowd to join :
The sober part of Israel, free from stain,
Well knew the value of a peaceful reign ;
And looking backward with a wise affright
Saw seams of wounds dishonest to the sight,
In contemplation of whose ugly scars
They cursed the memory of civil wars.
The moderate sort of men, thus qualified,
Inclined the balance to the better side ;
And David's mildness managed it so well,
The bad found no occasion to rebel.
But when to sin our biassed nature leans,
The careful Devil is still at hand with means

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father was unable to see these or was not inclined to take any notice of these. Some misdeeds, committed by him in the heat of passion and in violation of the law, were condoned by the King as being a result of the surplus energy of youth and as providing a healthy outlet to that energy. The murderous onslaught made on Sir John Coventry by the Duke of Monmouth's agents was defended by the King (and his courtiers) as being a fair revenge for the attack which Sir John Coventry had made on the reputation of the King. In this way the noble Duke of Monmouth lived in the midst of love and admiration, while Charles sat undisturbed on his throne in London.

Lines 43—78. But human life can never be wholly (or purely) happy. God punishes those who are bad, and puts to test those who are the best. The English are as violently self-willed, moody, and grumbling a people as have ever benefited by the unlimited grace of God. God had been over-indulgent to these people. The result was that they could easily be corrupted. No King could govern them, and no God could please them. (They had worshipped and discarded gods of every shape and size that the makers of divine images could make or that the priests could set up before them). These people, being too lucky in enjoying freedom, made the same mistake as Adam who, enjoying all the freedom in the Garden of Eden, felt impatient of the slight restriction placed on that freedom. These people began to imagine that they did not enjoy complete freedom. And when they found that there was no other nation, in the present or in the past, that was subject to fewer legal restraints and curbs than themselves, they allowed their wild fancy to travel to woods and caves and they came to the conclusion that only savages, who lived under no law or legally constituted government, enjoyed complete freedom. These were the people who, after the death of Oliver Cromwell, forced his foolish son, Richard Cromwell, to resign the office of the Lord Protector of England, and they did so without using any violence. These very people had brought Charles, who had been living in the Netherlands in exile, to England and proclaimed him King of England by general agreement and in the midst of great popular enthusiasm. These very people who, at their very best, were led more by their whims than by their sense of loyalty, now wondered why they had so long obeyed a statue-like monarch whom they had themselves put on the throne. They now thought that, if they had made him their King, they could also unmake him, or sacrifice him in the name of the republic, just as the Israelites had worshipped a golden calf instead of God and thus proved to be impious. But such thoughts were only random attacks on the King. There was as yet no well-formed plan against the King. Nor did any motive of self-interest lead the factious people to combine against the monarch. The sober part of the English population, free as they were from any guilty designs, were well aware of the blessings of a peaceful rule. And, as they looked back at the past and saw the ugly and disgusting scars of the wounds that had been suffered by their country during the civil wars, ther were wisely filled with

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And providently pimps for ill desires :
The good old cause, revived, a plot requires,
Plots true or false are necessary things,
To raise up commonwealths and ruin kings.
The inhabitants of old Jerusalem
Were Jebusites ; the town so called from them,
And theirs the native right.
But when the chosen people grew more strong,
The rightful cause at length became the wrong ;
And every loss the men of Jebus bore,
They still were thought God's enemies the more.
Thus worn and weakened, well or ill content,
Submit they must to David's government :
Impoverished and deprived of all command,
Their taxes doubled as they lost their land ;
And, what was harder yet to flesh and blood,
Their gods disgraced, and burnt like common wood.
This set the heathen priesthood in a flame,
For priests of all religions are the same,
Of whatsoe'er descent their godhead be,
Stock, stone, or other homely pedigree,
In his defence his servants are as bold,
As if he had been born of beaten gold,
The Jewish Rabbins, though their enemies,
In this conclude them honest men and wise :
For 'twas their duty, all the learned think,
To espouse his cause by whom they eat and drink,
From hence began that Plot, the nation's curse,
Bad in itself, but represented worse,
Raised in extremes, and in extremes decried,
With oaths affirmed, with dying vows denied,
Not weighed or winnowed by the multitude,
But swallowed in the mass, unchewed and crude,
Some truth there was, but dashed and brewed with lies
To please the fools and puzzle all the wise :
Succeeding times did equal folly call
Believing nothing or believing all,

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a fear lest those experiences should be repeated. The moderate type of people, who were in this state of mind, put their weight on the right side, and Charles handled the situation with such gentleness that the bad people found no excuse to revolt against him.

Lines 79—84. But when human nature is prejudiced and inclines towards wickedness, the devil who is on the look-out for such opportunities is always ready with help and employs all methods to cater to, or strengthen, evil designs. The republican cause was revived, and what was needed next was a scheme or a plan of action. Conspiracies, whether based on facts or fictions, are essential to build commonwealths and to bring about the downfall of Kings.

Lines 85—107. The inhabitants of the old city of London were Roman Catholics by faith. The city was named after them, and it was their native right to rule that city. But when the Protestants of London became stronger, they began to look upon the correct faith of Roman Catholics as wrong and incorrect. The greater the injuries the Roman Catholics were made to suffer, the greater grew the belief that they were the enemies of God. They thus found themselves weakened and sick at heart. But, whether they liked it or not, whether they could accept the situation or not, they had to submit to the government of King Charles. They were reduced to poverty and they were deprived of the right to hold positions of authority. Their taxes were doubled and they were deprived of their land. But an injustice, more difficult to endure for the human heart, was that the images of their deities and their sacred relics were dishonoured and burnt like common wood. This enraged and infuriated the Roman Catholic priests, because priests of all religions are alike in this respect (namely, that a show of disrespect to their gods makes them burn with rage). Whatever the origin or the line of descent of their divinity, whether stock, stone or some other humble descent, they are as quick and bold to defend that divinity as if it had been born of beaten gold. The Protestant divines, although hostile to the Roman Catholic faith, approved of the attitude of the Catholic priests in this respect and considered them to be honest and wise because, as all the learned people believe, it was their duty to stand by the cause which was a source of livelihood for them.

Lines 108—117. It was this situation that led to the hatching of a conspiracy (the Popish Plot) which proved a curse to the nation. This conspiracy was certainly bad but it was represented as being worse than it actually was. It was the result of an extremist attitude on the part of Protestants, and people went to an extreme in criticising it. Men (like Titus Oates) declared on oath that there was a conspiracy, and men (like Coleman) declared on oath while dying that there was no conspiracy. The common people, who did not examine or sift the evidence, accepted the allegations as true without

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The Egyptian rites the Jebusites embraced,
Where gods were recommended by their taste;
Such savoury deities must needs be good
As served at once for worship and for food,
By force they could not introduce these gods;
For ten to one in former days was odds:
So fraud was used, the sacrificer's trade;
Fools are more hard to conquer than persuade.
Their busy teachers mingled with the Jews
And raked for converts even the court and stews:
Which Hebrew priests the more unkindly took,
Because the fleece accompanies the flock.
Some thought they God's anointed meant to slay
By guns, invented since full many a day:
Our author swears it not; but who can know
How far the Devil and Jebusites may go?
This plot, which failed for want of common sense,
Had yet a deep and dangerous consequence;
For as, when raging fevers boil the blood,
The standing lake soon floats into a flood,
And every hostile humour which before
Slept quiet in its channels bubbles o'er;
So several factions from this first ferment
Work up to foam and threat the government.
Some by their friends, more by themselves thought wise,
Opposed the power to which they could not rise.
Some had in courts been great and thrown from thence,
Like fiends were hardened in impenitence.
Some by their Monarch's fatal mercy grown
From pardoned rebels kinsmen to the throne
Were raised in power and public office high;
Strong bands, if bands ungrateful men could tie.
Of these the false Achitophel was first.

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in the least trying to discriminate between truth and falsehood. Some truth there certainly was in the allegations that there was a conspiracy, but there was a lot of falsehood mixed and mingled with the truth to please the fools and to confuse all the wise men. The succeeding generations committed the same folly of either completely disbelieving the allegations or believing the allegations in their entirety.

Lines 118—129. The Roman Catholics took over the ceremonies observed by the Roman Catholics of France and made them a part of their life, because it suited their taste to do so. They felt convinced that pleasant deities, who served a double purpose by offering them the opportunity of religious worship and the opportunity to earn their living, must definitely be holy. They could not introduce these deities into England by violence because their population was only one-tenth of the number of Protestants. Unable to use violence they used fraud which is the favourite method used by a sacrificer to gain his ends. Besides, it is less difficult to win over fools through false propaganda than to win them over by force. Accordingly, the Roman Catholic preachers got busy, mingling with the Protestants and searching for converts to their points of view at the royal court and in brothels. The Protestant priests disliked this course of action on the part of Catholic preachers all the more, because it meant not only the conversion of people to the Roman Catholic faith but also a loss of income to the Protestant priests.

Lines 130—149. Some were of the opinion that the Catholics planned to kill the English King, who ruled the country under divine authority, by firing at him with guns that had been invented many days before. The author of this poem cannot swear to the correctness of this view; but nobody knows the length to which the devil and the Roman Catholics can go to do mischief. This conspiracy, which failed because the persons behind it were lacking in common sense, had yet a far-reaching and dangerous result. Just as the calmly-flowing blood in a human body is agitated by a raging fever and begins almost to boil, thus bringing into open every disease which previously lay dormant and suppressed, so several political parties (which had remained dormant before) came to the surface as a result of this initial plot and, in a state of excitement and rage, posed a threat to the government. Some persons, who were thought by their friends to be wise, began to oppose the government because they could not rise to high positions of authority. More persons, who were wise in their own eyes, opposed the government for the same reason. Some of the opponents had previously occupied high positions at the court and had been dismissed from those positions. These persons were, like devils, hardened in their hostility to royal authority. Some of them were persons who had once rebelled against the King but been pardoned by him. They included those who were related to the King by blood. The King had committed the fatal mistake of showing mercy to such offenders and had raised

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A name to all succeeding ages curst
For close designs and crooked counsels fit,
Sagacious, bold, and turbulent of wit,
Restless, unfixed in principles and place,
In power unpleased, impatient of disgrace;
A fiery soul, which working out its way,
Fretted the pigmy body to decay
And o'er-informed the tenement of clay.
A daring pilot in extremity,
Pleased with the danger, when the waves went high,
He sought the storms; but, for a calm unfit,
Would steer too nigh the sands to boast his wit.
Great wits are sure to madness near allied
And thin partitions do their bounds divide;
Else, why should he, with wealth and honour blest,
Refuse his age the needful hours of rest?
Punish a body which he could not please,
Bankrupt of life, yet prodigal of ease?
And all to leave what with his toil he won
To that unfeathered two-legged thing, a son,

Got, while his soul did huddled notions try,
And born a shapeless lump, like anarchy.
In friendship false, implacable in hate,
Resolved to ruin or to rule the state;
To compass this the triple bond he broke,
The pillars of the public safety shook,
And fitted Israel for a foreign yoke;
Then, seized with fear, yet still affecting fame,
Usurped a patriot's all-atoning name.
So easy still it proves in factious times
With public zeal to cancel private crimes.
How safe is treason and how sacred ill,
Where none can sin against the people's will,
Where crowds can wink and no offence be known,
Since in another's guilt they find their own!
Yet fame deserved no enemy can grudge;

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them to public offices of high authority. These persons constituted strong groups, if it is possible to speak of ungrateful men as forming groups.

Lines 150—158. Of these, the Earl of Shaftesbury was the foremost traitor. His name was cursed even by posterity. He was fitted for secret intrigues and underhand methods. He was intelligent, fearless, and of a stormy nature. He was restless and unable to stick to any office or principle. His lust for power was unlimited and he was intolerant of any blow to his dignity. He had an over-energetic mind which, by seeking an outlet, undermined an already weak body, and which completely overwhelmed his physical frame.

Lines 159—162. He was a fearless leader in times of danger. Danger only pleased him and, whenever the political atmosphere became stormy, he found himself in his true element. But he was not suited to times of peace because, during such times, his actions proved harmful to such an extent that he could hardly claim to possess any wisdom.

Lines 163—172. Great thinkers or philosophers are surely very much like madmen and can hardly be distinguished from them. Otherwise how could it be that Shaftesbury, after having achieved both wealth and honour, should continue to work hard, thus denying to himself that rest which is needed in old age? Why should he impose an unnecessary burden upon his body which he could not please? Why should he, having very little physical energy left in his body, waste it mercilessly? Why should he, furthermore, leave his hard-earned wealth to that two-legged creature without feathers, namely his son, who was conceived at a moment when Shaftesbury's mind was in a confused state of thinking, and who at his birth looked an absurd mass of flesh so deformed that Nature appeared to have departed from rule.

Lines 173—185. He was treacherous in friendship and merciless in hatred. He was determined either to acquire high authority in the country or to wreck the country. To achieve his object he violated the Triple Alliance (between England, Sweden and Holland) by instigating the war against Holland. Thus he gave a heavy blow to the guarantee of peace, and prepared the way for the slavery of England (by a secret treaty with France). Then, overcome by the fear of the consequences of his own actions but still pretending to be a favourite of the people, he claimed to be a patriot in order to neutralize the effect of all his misdeeds. In times of party intrigues, it is really very easy to hide one's wicked actions by pretending enthusiasm for public welfare. Traitors are, indeed, safe, and evil-doers are respected, in times when people have themselves become sinful and corrupt, and when people shut their eyes to treason and wickedness because they are themselves wicked and degraded.

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The statesman we abhor, but praise the judge.
In Israel's courts ne'er sat an Abbethdin
With more discerning eyes or hands more clean,
Unbribed, unsought, the wretched to redress,
Swift of despatch and easy of access.
Oh! had he been content to serve the crown
With virtues only proper to the gown,
Or had the rankness of the soil been freed
From cockle that oppressed the noble seed,
David for him his tuneful harp had strung
And Heaven had wanted one immortal song.
But wild ambition loves to slide, not stand,
And Fortune's ice prefers to Virtue's land.
Achitophel, grown weary to possess
A lawful fame and lazy happiness,
Disdained the golden fruit to gather free
And lent the crowd his arm to shake the tree.
Now, manifest of crimes contrived long since
He stood at bold defiance with his Prince,
Held up the buckler of the people's cause
Against the crown, and skulked behind the laws.
The wished occasion of the Plot he takes;
Some circumstances finds, but more he makes;
By buzzing emissaries fills the ears
Of listening crowds with jealousies and fears
Of arbitrary counsels brought to light,
And proves the king himself a Jebusite
Weak arguments! which yet he knew full well
Were strong with people easy to rebel.
For governed by the moon, the giddy Jews
Tread the same track when she the prime renews
And once in twenty years their scribes record,
By natural instinct they change their lord.
Achitophel still wants a chief, and none
Was found so fit as warlike Absalon.
Not that he wished his greatness to create,
For politicians neither love nor hate:
But, for he knew his title not allowed
Would keep him still depending on the crowd,

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Lines 186—197. In spite of that, even an enemy of Shaftesbury would not be unwilling to ackowledge the fame which he had earned by his own merit. We hate Shaftesbury the politician but admire Shaftesbury the judge. Even a president of the ancient Jewish courts could not have been so penetrating in his judgment, so incorruptible, so eager to do justice, so prompt in dealing with cases, and so sympathetic towards his petitioners, as Shaftesbury was. We wish, indeed, that he had been satisfied with serving the King in his judicial capacity only, or that he had tried to rid his character of the evil elements which overpowered his better nature. Had he done so, David (or Charles II) would have written a song in praise of his greatness, thus reducing by one the number of songs David wrote in praise of God.

Lines 198—203. But a man who is reckless in his ambition does not want stability; he wants a rapid progress. Such a man prefers the inconstancy and instability of luck to the equilibrium and solidity offered by the path of virtue. Shaftesbury became sick of the fame that he had won lawfully and of the happiness which he enjoyed and which involved no action or adventure. He became contemptuous of the life of pleasure which he had been enjoying; he now wanted to multiply his gains without limit.

Lines 204—219. Now, the crimes which he had been plotting for a long time having been exposed, he came into the open, and boldly defied the authority of the King. He tried to defend himself by espousing (or supporting) what he called the rights of the people against the King, and he tried to take shelter behind the laws of the land. The plot which the Catholics had been hatching against the King was seized by Shaftesbury as an opportunity that he had wished for. He found some evidence to show that there really was a plot, but he invented or manufactured more evidence to strengthen his case. He made use of agents who busily went about whispering into the ears of the common people stories of how the King had been acting in an arbitrary or despotic manner and thus arousing jealousies and fears among the people. By circulating such rumours, he tried to prove that King Charles was himself secretly a Roman Catholic. His arguments were feeble, but he knew full well that these arguments carried weight with people who were temperamentally inclined to rebel against the ruler. The English people are fickle-minded. Their ruling planet is the moon which is inconstant and which keeps changing its phases. The English historians tell us that it is a natural instinct of the English people to change their monarch once in every twenty years just as a new lunar cycle begins after every nineteen years.

Lines 220—229. But Shaftesbury still needed somebody whom he could set up as a leader, and he found that nobody was suited to play this role as well as the war-like Duke of Monmouth. In choosing the Duke of Monmouth, it was not Shaftesbury's intention

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That kingly power, thus ebbing out, might be
Drawn to the dregs of a democracy.
Him he attempts with studied arts to please
And sheds his venom in such words as these :
"Auspicious prince, at whose nativity
"Some royal planet ruled the southern sky,
"Thy longing country's darling and desire,
"Their cloudy pillar and their guardian fire,
"Their second Moses, whose extended wand
"Divides the seas and shows the promised land,
"Whose dawning day in every distant age
"Has exercised the sacred prophet's rage,
"The people's prayer, the glad diviner's theme.
"The young men's vision, and the old men's dream,
"Thee Saviour, thee the nation's vows confess,
"And never satisfied with seeing bless :
"Swift unbespoken pomps thy steps proclaim,
"And stammering babes are taught to lisp thy name.
"How long wilt thou the general joy detain,
"Starve and defraud the people of thy reign ?
"Content ingloriously to pass thy days,
"Like one of virtue's fools that feeds on praise;
"Till thy fresh glories, which now shine so bright,
"Grow stale and tarnish with our daily sight.
"Believe me, royal youth, thy fruit must be
"Or gathered ripe, or rot upon the tree.
"Heaven has to all allotted, soon or late,
"Some lucky revolution of their fate :
"Whose motions if we watch and guide with skill,
"(For human good depends on human will,)
"Our fortune rolls as from a smooth descent
"And from the first impression takes the bent;
"But, if unseized, she glides away like wind
"And leaves repenting folly far behind.
"Now, now she meets you with a glorious prize
"And spreads her locks before her as she flies.
"Had thus old David, from whose loins you spring,
"Not dared, when Fortune called him to be King,
"At Gath an exile he might still remain,
"And Heaven's anointing oil had been in vain.

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Reference to the Red Sea

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Ref. to Milton's Lycidas, Chapter 3.

to establish the greatness of that man. Politicians neither love anybody nor hate anybody; (they are interested only in achieving greatness for themslves.) His reason for choosing the Duke of Monmouth was that the Duke, having no legal or valid claim to the throne, would continue to depend on the support of the common people. His intention was that, royal authority being thus undermined and declining, it might make way for the rule of the contemptible mob. Accordingly, he made deliberate efforts to please the Duke of Monmouth, and gave an outlet to his poison against the King in such words as the following :

Lines 230—261. "You are lucky by birth, O Prince ! Some highly favourable star was in the ascendant in the southern sky when you were born. You are greatly loved by the people of this country who have a strong desire that you should rule them. They treat you with the same respect as was shown by the Israelites towards the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire by which they were guided in the course of their journey through the wilderness. These people look upon you as a divine leader just as the Israelites looked upon Moses who, by the flourish of his rod, worked the miracle of dividing the ocean and showing to his followers the land which God had promised to give them in order to enable them to settle there and start a new life. Holy prophets of every distant and bygone age were prompted by a divine inspiration to prophesy your birth. You represent the fulfilment of the prayers of the people. You have been the subject of talk of astrologers who felt happy to foresee this day. You are a personification of the desire of young men and an embodiment of the dream of old men. You will prove to be the saviour of the nation, and the nation swears its support and allegiance to you. The nation is always desirous of seeing you. The more they see you the more they want to see you. They invoke God's favour on you. Wherever you go, processions are formed promptly and without any previous notice to welcome you and to announce your arrival. Infants who are learning to speak are taught to pronounce your name (because your name is on everybody's lips). How long will you make the people wait for you to become their King and how long must they wait to celebrate that occasion ? How long will you make them wait hungrily for the benefits of your reign and how long will you deprive them of that pleasure ? (It seems that you are) content to pass your days in a state of obscurity like one of those fools who follow the path of virtue and who feel happy because they are being praised. You will pass your days thus till the new honours, which you have won and which make you so attractive now, lose their glitter and become stale and dim by being seen daily. Believe me, young Prince, you must pluck the fruit now when it is ripe because, if you do not, it will rot upon the tree and become useless. (You must strike when the iron is hot, or you will feel sorry at having lost the opportunity). Heaven has so ordained that every human being gets, sooner or later, an opportunity which

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"Let his successful youth your hopes engage,
"But shun the example of declining age.
"Behold him setting in his western skies,
"The shadows lengthening as the vapours rise;
"He is not now, as when, on Jordan's sand,
"The joyful people thronged to see him land,
"Covering the beach and blackening all the strand,
"But like the Prince of Angels, from his height
"Comes tumbling downward with diminished light
"Betrayed by one poor Plot to public scorn,
"(Our only blessing since his curst return,)
"Those heaps of people, which one sheaf did bind,
"Blown off and scattered by a puff of wind.
"What strength can he to your designs oppose,
"Naked of friends, and round beset with foes?
"If Pharaoh's doubtful succour he should use,
"A foreign aid would more incense the Jews;
"Proud Egypt would dissembled friendship bring,
"Foment the war but not support the king:
"Nor would the royal party e'er unite
"With Pharaoh's arms to assist the Jebusite;
"Or, if they should, their interest soon would break
"And with such odious aid make David weak.
"All sorts of men, by my successful arts
"Abhorring kings, estrange their altered hearts
"From David's rule: and 'tis the general cry,
"Religion, commonwealth, and liberty.
"If you, as champion of the public good,
"Add to their arms a chief of royal blood,
"What may not Israel hope, and what applause
"Might such a general gain by such a cause?
"Not barren praise alone, that gaudy flower
"Fair only to the sight, but solid power,
"And nobler is a limited command,
"Given by the love of all your native land,
"Than a successive title, long and dark,
"Drawn from the mouldy rolls of Noah's ark."

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can bring about a lucky transformation in his life. The good of human beings depends upon their own will. Therefore, if we are vigilant and if we make skilful use of the opportunities which fate offers us, no hurdles will obstruct the progress of our careers and we shall continue to rise upwards, Once fortune begins to favour us, it will continue its favourable trend. But, if we do not utilise our opportunities, our luck will slip away, and disappear like the wind, leaving us to repent of our folly. In your case, Fortune is now ready to offer you a glorious prize. You can now catch hold of Fortune by her fore-locks. If you miss, she will flee and you will not be able to catch her.

Lines 262—302. If old Charles, who begot you, had not shown the courage to accept the offer of fortune to make him King, he would still have remained in exile in Brussels, and the holy oil, with which he was anointed when he was crowned as the King, would have been useless in his case. You should base your hopes on the success achieved by him in his youthful days, but you should not follow his example now when he has grown old and lost his energies. See how he is losing his radiance like the sun setting in the western sky, and see how his influence is waning just as the light of the sun diminishes as it sets. He is not the same Charles now as he was when he landed on Dover Beach where the English people had joyfully gathered to welcome him in such large numbers that the sea-shore itself was rendered completely invisible, being covered fully with multitudes of human beings. Now his power and authority are declining and he may be compared to Lucifer who, after falling from divine grace, was expelled from heavenly regions and thus lost much of his splendour. The Popish Plot, by no means very powerful, but the only redeeming feature of the cursed regime of Charles, has served to expose him to the scorn of the people. The large numbers of people who unitedly stood behind the King have been dispersed and scattered by the disruptive effect of that one weak plot. Deserted by friends, and wholly surrounded by enemies, he hardly has the strength to oppose your designs. If he makes use of the help of the French King (Louis XIV) of whose support he cannot be sure, the English Protestants would feel even more annoyed with him for invoking help from a foreign quarter. France, which is proud of its power, would offer only a feigned friendship to him. France would encourage civil war in England but would not support Charles. Nor would the supporters of the King unite with the French army to help the Roman Catholics in England. Or, if they do so, their strength would soon crumble, and the authority of Charles would be weakened because of the help being given to him by an ally who is hated here. I have employed such successful methods that all sorts of people have developed a hatred for monarchy and no longer feel any respect or love for Charles's rule. There is now a general and forceful demand for the upholding of religion, commonwealth, and liberty. If you, who have royal blood in your veins, come

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What cannot praise effect in mighty minds,
When flattery soothes and when ambition blinds?
Desire of power, on earth a vicious weed,
Yet sprung from high is of celestial seed;
In God 'tis glory, and when men aspire,
'Tis but a spark too much of heavenly fire.
The ambitious youth, too covetous of fame,
Too full of angel's metal in his frame,
Unwarily was led from virtue's ways,
Made drunk with honour and debauched with praise.
Half loth and half consenting to the ill,
For loyal blood within him struggled still,
He thus replied: "And what pretence have I
"To take up arms for public liberty?
"My father governs with unquestioned right,
"The faith's defender and mankind's delight,
"Good, gracious, just, observant of the laws;
"And Heaven by wonders has espoused his cause.
"Whom has he wronged in all his peaceful reign?
"Who sues for justice to his throne in vain?
"What millions has he pardoned of his foes
"Whom just revenge did to his wrath expose.
"Mild, easy, humble, studious of our good,
"Inclined to mercy and averse from blood.
"If mildness ill with stubborn Israel suit,
"His crime is God's beloved attribute.
"What could he gain his people to betray

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forward as a champion of the public good and strengthen the people by becoming their leader, England can have great hopes for the future, and the leader (that is, you) will gain general acclaim by supporting the public cause. You will not only earn people's praise which in itself is meaningless and therefore comparable to a showy flower pleasing only to the sense of sight; but you will acquire solid authority. And even limited authority, gained through the love of the people of your native land, is a nobler achievement than kingship gained through succession to the throne by virtue of a legal claim derived from a long and ancient ancestry (or, derived from an ancestry which goes as far back to the past as Noah's Ark mentioned in the Bible)".

Lines 303—315. When flattery has a soothing and ambition a blinding effect on a human being, praise (like that offered above) can sway him in any desired manner, no matter how powerful his mind may be. The desire to wield power is like a harmful weed growing on the earth, but this desire originated in heaven and has a divine source. This desire for power is something glorious in God; and when human beings become ambitious of power they show a tendency to emulate God (or, they show that they have a little too much of the divine element in them). The Duke of Monmouth was an ambitious young man. Having an excessive desire for fame or reputation, he had too much of Lucifer's nature in his composition. He was, therefore, unwittingly led away from the right path. He was intoxicated by glowing tributes and corrupted by too much praise. He was half willing to accept Shaftesbury's evil counsel, but he was also half-unwilling because there was in him an element of loyalty towards the King and this loyal feeling struggled for supremacy. He made the following reply to Shaftesbury's speech.

Lines 316—72. "And what excuse do I have to start a fight in defence of the freedom of the people? My father governs the kingdom with an undisputed right. He is the defender of the faith (or the religion of the people,) and he is a source of joy to all mankind. He is noble, generous and just, and he obeys and enforces the laws of the land. By wonderfully supporting his cause, God made him the King. Is there anyone to whom he has done any injustice during his entire rule which has been an era of peace? Is there anyone who has pleaded for justice before his throne and been denied justice? Has he not pardoned those numberless enemies who incurred his wrath by opposing him and whom he should have punished for that opposition? He is gentle, lenient (or easily accessible), humble, and always striving for the public good. He has a merciful nature, and he has a dislike for bloodshed. (If it is a fault in him that he is gentle in dealing with his obstinate subjects, his fault is one from which God himself is not free and one which makes people love God. What can he gain by betraying his people and what can he gain by giving up his right to rule his people and accepting the arbitrary rule of the French King? Let the arrogant French King damn

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"Or change his right for arbitrary sway ?
"Let haughty Pharaoh curse with such a reign
"His fruitful Nile, and yoke a servile train.
"If David's rule Jerusalem displease,
"The dog-star heats their brains to this disease.
"Why then should I, encouraging the bad,
"Turn rebel and run popularly mad ?
"Were he a tyrant, who by lawless might
"Oppressed the Jews and raised the Jebusite,
"Well might I mourn; but nature's holy bands
"Would curb my spirits and restrain my hands;
"The people might assert their liberty,
"But what was right in them were crime in me.
"His favour leaves me nothing to require,
"Prevents my wishes and outruns desire:
"What more can I expect while David lives ?
"All but his kingly diadem he gives :
"And that"—But there he paused, then sighing said,
"Is justly destined for a worthier head;
"For when my father from his toils shall rest
"And late augment the number of the blest,
"His lawful issue shall the throne ascend,
"Or the collateral line, where that shall end.
"His brother, though oppressed with vulgar spite,
"Yet dauntless and secure of native right,
"Of every royal virtue stands possest,
"Still dear to all the bravest and the best.
"His courage foes, his friends his truth proclaim,
"His loyalty the King, the world his fame.
"His mercy even the offending crowd will find,
"For sure he comes of a forgiving kind.
"Why should I then repine at Heaven's decree
"Which gives me no pretence to royalty ?
"Yet oh that Fate, propitiously inclined,
"Had raised my birth or had debased my mind,
"To my large soul not all her treasure lent,
"And then betrayed it to a mean decent !
"I find, I find my mounting spirits bold,
"And David's part disdains my mother's mould.
"Why am I scanted by a niggard birth ?
"My soul disclaims the kindred of her earth
"And, made for empire, whispers me within.
"Desire of greatness is a god-like sin."

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his fertile land (irrigated by the river Nile) with his arbitrary rule, and let him tyrannise over his slavish people. If the people of London are displeased with King Charles' rule, it means that their brains have been heated by the dog-star Sirius and that they are therefore not in their right minds. Why then should I encourage the wicked elements in the State by revolting against the King and run madly after the people (or try like a madman to gain the applause of the people, or act madly in the manner of the common people) ? If the King had been a ruthless dictator and if he had, by exercising power in an illegal manner, persecuted the Protestants and given undue concessions to the Catholics, I would have been justified in deploring that state of affairs, but even then my natural filial feelings towards him would have restrained my mind and checked me from making any move against him. The people might have demanded their freedom, and they would have been right. But the same demand from me would have been a crime (because I, being his son, must not revolt against him). He is so kind to me that he has supplied all my wants. He meets my needs before those needs are felt by me, and fulfils my desires before they take shape in my mind. What more can I expect to get during the lifetime of King Charles ? He gives me everything except only his crown, and the crown—"; but there he paused and then, after a sigh, said : "and the crown is rightly meant to be worn by a person who is worthier than myself, because when my father ceases from his labours and rests in death thus adding to the number of people who have already died and been received in heaven, his legitimate son shall ascend the throne and, if he has no legitimate son, his brother James who is the lawful heir, being the son of the same father, will do so. His brother, though he is oppressed by the ill-will of the common people, remains firm. He is quite secure in his right to succeed to the throne, and he possesses every virtue that a person of royal blood is expected to possess. All the bravest and best people love him dearly. His courage is recognised even by his enemies. His integrity is proclaimed by his friends. His loyalty is recognised by the King. His fame has spread over the whole world. His merciful nature will be recognised even by the offending common people, because he surely belongs to the category of forgiving people. Why should I then feel sad over the divine will which gives me no excuse to claim the throne ? Yet I do wish that fate had been favourably inclined towards me and had raised my status to that of a legitimate child of the King or had given me a vulgar mind (without any spark of ambition in it). It is a pity that fate endowed my generous soul with all the fine qualities only to damn me wtih the stigma of illegitimacy.

I find that my bold spirit is now rising. I, who am the image of my mother, am not owned by King Charles as a legitimate son. Why should my illegitmate birth diminish my importance ? My soul refuses to admit that there is any relationship between

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Him staggering so when Hell's dire agent found,
While fainting virtue scarce maintained her ground,
He pours fresh forces in, and thus replies :
"The eternal God, supremely good and wise,
"Imparts not these prodigious gifts in vain.
"What wonders are reserved to bless your reign
"Against your will your arguments have shown,
"Such virtue's only given to guide a throne.
"Not that your father's mildness I contemn,
"But manly force becomes the diadem.
"'Tis true he grants the people all they crave,
"And more perhaps than subjects ought to have :
"For lavish grants suppose a monarch tame
"And more his goodness than his wit proclaim,
"But when should people strive their bonds to break,
"If not when kings are negligent or weak ?
"Let him give on till he can give no more,
"The thrifty Sanhedrin shall keep him poor;
"And every shekel which he can receive
"Shall cost a limb of his prerogative.
"To ply him with new plots shall be my care,
"Or plunge him deep in some expensive war;
"Which when his treasure can no more supply,
"He must with the remains of kingship buy.
"His faithful friends our jealousies and fears
"Call Jebusites and Pharaoh's pensioners,
"Whom when our fury from his aid has torn,
"He shall be naked left to public scorn.
"The next successor, whom I fear and hate,
"My arts have made obnoxious to the State,
"Turned all his virtues to his overthrow,
"And gained our elders to pronounce a foe.
"His right for sums of necessary gold
"Shall first be pawned, and afterwards be sold;
"Till time shall ever-wanting David draw
"To pass your doubtful title into law.
"If not, the people have a right supreme
"To make their kings, for kings are made for them.
"All empire is no more than power in trust,
"Which, when resumed, can be no longer just.
"Succession, for the general good designed,
"In its own wrong a nation cannot bind :
"If altering that the people can relieve,
"Better one suffer than a nation grieve.
"The Jews well know their power : ere Saul they chose
"God was their King, and God they durst depose.

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it and the common earthly people. My soul, which is made to rule an empire, tells me inwardly in a whisper that, even if the desire to attain greatness is a sin, this sin has a divine character."

Lines 373—426. When Shaftesbury, the wicked agent of the Devil, found the Duke of Monmouth wavering and his loyalty to his father diminishing and unable to maintain its strength, he made the following reply in order to reinforce the effect that he had produced : "The everlasting God, the possessor of infinite goodness and wisdom, does not bestow such marvellous gifts (as you possess) on anybody without a definite purpose. Who knows what wonderful benefits will accrue to the people during your reign if you become their monarch ? Your arguments have proved, though it was not your intention to prove, that goodness and nobility which you possess are given to a man only to enable him to rule a nation. It is not that I condemn your father's gentleness. What I maintain is that a manly strength goes well with the status of a King. It is true that Charles grants all the wishes and desires of the people. And perhaps he grants them more than they ought to get, because too much generosity from a King makes the people think that he is submissive. Such generosity creates among the people an impression of a King's goodness rather than of his wisdom. But the most appropriate time for the people to try to shake off the restraints imposed upon them by a King is when a King is found to be either negligent in the performance of his duties or if he is found to be weak. Let Charles go on being as generous towards the people as he wants till he comes to the end of his resources. The parliament, which is not so liberal, shall not permit this generosity and will therefore curtail his means. And every penny that he receives by the authority of the parliament will mean a loss of some part of his royal authority. It shall be my concern to trouble him by hatching new conspiracies against him or to make him get deeply involved in some costly war the expenses of which he will not be able to pay for long from the royal treasury and to meet which he will have to bargain away whatever of royal anthority is left with him. On account of our jealousies and fears of the King, we describe his loyal supporters as Roman Catholics and as being in the pay of the French King. When, in our rage, we snap the bonds between him and those supporters by putting an end to his patronage of them, he shall be left alone to face the scorn of the people. I fear and hate the man who stands next in succession to the throne. By my cunning I have made him hateful in the eyes of the people. I have made use of his very virtues to bring about his overthrow and prevailed upon members of the parliament to proclaim him as an enemy of the nation and therefore not entitled to the throne. His right of succession will first be mortgaged by Charles for the money which the King needs badly and then altogether bargained away for the same reason. In this way, King Charles, who is

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"Urge now your piety, your filial name,
"A father's right and fear of future fame,
"The public good, that universal call,
"To which even Heaven submitted, answers all.
"Nor let his love enchant your generous mind ;
"'Tis Nature's trick to propagate her kind.
"Our fond begetters, who would never die,
"Love but themselves in their posterity.
"Or let his kindness by the effects be tried
"Or let him lay his vain pretence aside.
"God said, He loved your father ; could He bring
"A better proof than to anoint him King ?

"It surely showed, He loved the shepherd well
"Who gave so fair a flock as Israel.
"Would David have you thought his darling son ?
"What means he then to alienate the crown ?
"The name of godly he may blush to bear ;
"'Tis after God's own heart to cheat his heir.
"He to his brother gives supreme command,
"To you a legacy of barren land,
"Perhaps the old harp on which he thrums his lays
"Or some dull Hebrew ballad in your praise.

"Then the next heir, a prince severe and wise,
"Already looks on you with jealous eyes,
"Sees through the thin disguises of your arts,
"And marks your progress in the people's hearts ;
"Though now his mighty soul its grief contains,
"He meditates revenge who least complains ;
"And like a lion, slumbering in the way
"Or sleep dissembling, while he waits his prey,
"His fearless foes within his distance draws,
"Constrains his roaring and contracts his paws,

"Till at the last, his time for fury found,
"He shoots with sudden vengeance from the ground ;
"The prostrate vulgar passes o'er and spares,
"But with a lordly rage his hunters tears ;
"Your case no tame expedients will afford,
"Resolve on death or conquest by the sword,
"Which for no less a stake than life you draw,
"And self-defence is Nature's eldest law
"Leave the warm people no considering time,
For then rebellion may be thought a crime.

"Prevail yourself of what occasion gives,
"But try your title while your father lives ;
"And, that your arms may have a fair pretence,
Proclaim you take them in the King's defence ;

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always in need of money, will in due course be forced to accept your doubtful claim to the throne and to proclaim it as being lawful and valid. If he does not do so, the people themselves have the supreme right to appoint their King, because Kings are meant to serve the interests of the people. All imperial authority vests with the King as a trust only (or, a King is no more than a trustee holding royal authority on behalf of the people), and when a King begins to exercise that authority as a personal right it can no longer be regarded as legal. The law of succession is intended to ensure the interest of the people in general. If this law makes it possible for a wrong to be committed, the nation is not bound to abide by it. In order to save the people from an injustice, that law can be changed because it is better that one man (a legal claimant to the throne) should suffer than that the whole nation should feel the baneful effects of the enforcement of that law. The English Protestants are well aware of their power. Before they chose Cromwell as their leader, they looked upon their King as their God, and they had the courage to remove God (or the King) from the throne. The national interest, the universal demand of the people to which even God yeilded (when Charles I was removed from the throne), justifies everything. Nor should you allow your generous mind to fall under the spell of your father's love for you. (A father's love for his son is nothing but a device by which Nature brings about the breeding of children and the continuance of the human race.) In producing us, our foolish (or loving) fathers, who wanted to attain a kind of immortality, have provided evidence of the fact that their love for us is nothing but an egoistic love of themselves (because in the children that they produce they only see their own image). —

Lines 427—476. Either let the King's love for you be judged by its results (in raising you to the position of the heir to the throne), or let him no longer pretend that he loves you. God said that he loved your father (Charles II), and he gave the best possible proof of that love by having him crowned as the King of England. By making him the leader or ruler of such a beautiful country as England, God proved that He loved Charles truly. If Charles wanted that you should be regarded as his beloved son, why did he proclaim somebody else as his heir thus debarring you from becoming the King after him? Charles may feel ashamed to claim that he is devoted to God, but it is God's own desire that he should deprive his legal heir (that is, his brother, James) of the right to the throne. The King has handed over the supreme power to his brother James, while to you he has merely given the owners hip of a piece of barren land (that is, the landed property whi ch he has settled upon you). He would perhaps also give you the old harp on which he plays the tunes of his songs, or he might compose a dull English poem in praise of you. The heir to the throne, James, is a Prince who is wise and harsh of temper. He has already become jealous of you. He can see through the thin

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"Whose sacred life each minute would expose
"To plots from seeming friends and secret foes.
"And who can sound the depth of David's soul ?
"Perhaps his fear his kindness may control :
"He fears his brother, though he loves his son,
"For plighted vows too let to be undone.
If so, by force he wishes to be gained,
Like women's lechery, to seem constrained.
"Doubt not : but, when he most affects the frown,
"Commit a pleasing rape upon the crown.
"Secure his person to secure your cause :
They, who possess the prince, possess the laws."
He said, and this advice above the rest
With Absalom's mild nature suited best ;
Unblamed of life (ambition set aside),
Not stained with cruelty nor puffed with pride,
How happy had he been, if Destiny
Had higher placed his birth or not so high !
His kingly virtues might have claimed a throne
And blessed all other countries but his own ;
But charming greatness since so few refuse,
'Tis juster to lament him than accuse.
Strong were his hopes a rival to remove,
With blandishments to gain the public love,
To head the faction while their zeal was hot
And popularly prosecute the plot.

To further this, Achitophel unites
The malcontents of all the Israelites,
Whose differing parties he could wisely join
For several ends to serve the same design ;
The best, (and of the princes some were such,)
Who thought the power of monarchy too much :
Mistaken men and patriots in their hearts,
Not wicked, but seduced by impious arts ;
By these the springs of property were bent
And wound so high they cracked the government.

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mask behind which you try to hide your schemes and devices, and he observes your growing popularity with the people. Although his powerful mind can now keep his dismay (born of jealousy) under control, it is clear that he is planning some action against you because the man who does not express his grievances surely contemplates taking revenge. Such a man is like a lion who sleeps or who pretends to be sleeping and who is waiting for his victim. This lion allows his bold enemies to come near; he refrains from roaring and from spreading his paws till at length the time comes for him to give vent to his rage and to make a sudden leap from the ground in order to attack the enemy. Such a man, like the lion, takes no notice of, and ignores, the ordinary and low creatures who lie prostrate with fear, but he pounces, in a state of royal fury, upon the enemies who were after him, and destroys them. You are in a position which does not permit you to resort to feeble devices. You have to make up your mind either to perish or to conquer by the sword which you must draw because what is at stake is your life (or, because your very life is now threatened), and self-defence is the most ancient law of nature. The people are now in a state of excitement. Do not give them any time to pause and think over the situation, because, if you delay action, your move may then be regarded as an act of treason. Make use of the opportunity that now offers itself, and try to establish your right to the throne while your father is still alive and, in order that your armed action may have a seeming justification you should declare that you are acting to defend the sacred life of the King which is each minute exposed to danger from plots being hatched by treacherous friends and by secret enemies. And who can read the deepest wishes of King Charles's heart? Perhaps his love for you may prove to be stronger than his fear of his brother. Although he loves you, he is afraid of his brother, and he finds it too late to undo the effect of the pledge that he has already given to make him King. If that is so, he would like to be defeated by force like lustful women who, while inwardly welcoming the opportunity for the satisfaction of their lust, pretend that force had been used against them. Be sure that, when he appears to be angry and annoyed, your action in usurping the throne and gaining it by force would be welcome to him. In order to make a success of your cause, take the King in your custody because those, who hold the ruler in their hands, can do whatever they like with the laws."

Lines 477—500. This is what he said, and this advice, more than any other, was most acceptable to the mild nature of the Duke of Monmouth. Leaving aside ambition, the Duke was free from all faults. His character was not marred by cruelty. Nor was he swollen with pride. He would have been a very happy man if fate had either given him a higher position by birth or not placed him in the high position in which he found himself. His royal virtues might then have enabled him to become a King, and his reign would have been a blessing for all countries except his own. But very few people can resist the temptation of trying to attain greatness. It

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The next for interest sought to embroil the state
To sell their duty at a dearer rate,
And make their Jewish markets of the throne;
Pretending public good to serve their own.
Others thought kings an useless heavy load,
Who cost too much and did too little good.
These were for laying honest David by
On principles of pure good husbandry
With them joined all the haranguers of the throng
That thought to get preferment by the tongue.

Who follow next a double danger bring,
Not only hating David, but the King;
The Solymaean rout, well versed of old
In godly faction and in treason bold,
Cowering and quaking at a conqueror's sword,
But lofty to a lawful prince restored,
Saw with disdain an Ethnic plot begun
And scorned by Jebusites to be outdone.
Hot Levites headed these; who, pulled before
From the ark, which in the Judges' days they bore,
Resumed their cant, and with a zealous cry
Pursued their old beloved theocracy,
Where Sanhedrin and priest enslaved the nation
And justified their spoils by inspiration;
For who so fit for reign as Aaron's race,
If once dominion they could found in grace?
These led the pack; though not of surest scent,
Yet deepest mouthed against the government.
A numerous host of dreaming saints succeed

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would therefore be more appropriate to deplore the Duke of Monmouth's ambition than to accuse him of any crime. He had firm hopes of being able to eliminate a rival as the heir to the throne, and he had firm hopes of winning the support of the people by wooing them. He hoped to head the party (which was opposed to the King) when the people's enthusiasm was yet at its height, and to pursue the plot against the King with popular support. To promote this aim, the Earl of Shaftesbury united the disgruntled elements in the population of England. He had the capacity and the wisdom to bring together parties which had been formed with different objectives but which could now combine to serve the same purpose. Some of the best people, and they included persons of royal blood, were of the opipion that the English monarchy had been given too much power. Some of these persons were at heart patriotic, but they were misled. They were not really wicked, but they were won over by means of cunning devices. These people made excessive claims on the basis of their property with the result that the government could not withstand this pressure and therefore suffered a heavy setback.

Lines 501—528. Next to these people were those who tried to involve the country in a civil war in order to promote their own interests. These persons wanted to sell their services for a higher price, and they wanted to make financial gain by exploiting the Crown. Posing to be well-wishers of the people at large, they wanted to benefit themselves. Others there were who thought that kingship was a needless and heavy burden on the State because the cost of maintaining it was very high while the good that it did was too little. These persons simply wanted to remove the good Charles from kingship on grounds of pure, simple, and wholesome economy. They were supported by all those orators who could collect a mob and deliver long speeches because they thought that they could raise themselves by their garrulity. Those who came next posed a double danger to the nation because they hated not only Charles but the monarchy itself. The London mob had had ample experience of religious strife in the past. They were bold in their treachery towards the King. They had shrunk and shuddered with fear at the violence committed by Cromwell, but they were arrogant towards the Prince (Charles) who had lawfully been made the King. They treated the Popish Plot with contempt because they could not tolerate that they should lag behind the Catholics in hatching a conspiracy to overthrow the King. These people were led by hot-headed priests. These priests, having been deprived by the Act of Uniformity* of the offices they had held during the days of the Commonwealth, re-asserted their vulgar ideas and sought, with a wild enthusiasm, to restore their old beloved theocratic state (which Cromwell had established). They wanted the restoration of that Commonwealth in which the parliament and the clegry had ruled

* passed in 1662

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Of the true old enthusiastic breed :
'Gainst form and order they their power employ,
Nothing to build and all things to destroy.
But far more numerous was the herd of such
Who think too little and who talk too much.
These out of mere instinct, they knew not why,
Adored their fathers' God and property,
And by the same blind benefit of Fate
The Devil and the Jebusite did hate :
Born to be saved even in their own despite,
Because they could not help believing right.

Such were the tools ; but a whole hydra more
Remains of sprouting heads too long to score.
Some of their chiefs were princes of the land;
In the first rank of these did Zimri stand,
A man so various that he seemed to be
Not one, but all mankind's epitome :
Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong,
Was everything by starts and nothing long ;
But in the course of one revolving moon
Was chemist, fiddler, statesman, and buffoon ;

Then all for women, painting, rhyming, drinking,
Besides ten thousand freaks that died in thinking.
Blest madman, who could every hour employ
With something new to wish or to enjoy !
Railing and praising were his usual themes,
And both, to show his judgment, in extremes :
So over violent or over civil
That every man with him was God or Devil.
In squandering wealth was his peculiar art ;
Nothing went unrewarded but desert.
Beggared by fools whom still he found too late,
He had his jest, and they had his estate.
He laughed himself from Court ; then sought relief
By forming parties, but could never be chief :
For spite of him, the weight of business fell

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the nation in a despotic manner and had justified their exploitation of the people by claiming that their actions were inspired directly by God. After all, who would be better fitted to rule the country than the priests if spiritual grace were regarded as the criterion of political authority (that is, if spiritual grace entitled a man to temporal rule)? They led the multitude. Though they did not constitute a sound leadership, they spoke endlessly and emphatically against the government.

Lines 529—542. Next followed a countless number of visionary priests who had been brought up and trained strictly in accordance with their old, fanatical religion. They used all their strength to strike at all decorum and discipline. They aimed not at building anything but at destroying all things. (Their mentality was wholly destructive, and not in the least constructive). But much larger was the crowd of those who think too little and who talk too much. These worshipped the God of their forefathers and they worshipped property. They did not know why they worshipped these because they were led purely by instinct (having been brought up that way). Because of the same blind instinct, which they owed to their birth and upbringing * , they hated the Devil and also the followers of the Roman Catholic faith. ((They were born to be saved, in spite of the fact that they did nothing to save themselves.)) They were to be saved because of their right beliefs which they held not because of any conviction but because of blind instinct. Such were the people the Earl of Shaftesbury used as his instruments. But in addition to them, there were numerous others, too many to be counted, who seemed to appear from nowhere to support him.

Lines 543—568. Some of the leaders were members of the royal family itself. Foremost among them was the Duke of Buckingham. He was a man of so much variety that he seemed to be not a single individual but one who summed up all mankind. He was rigid in holding his opinions, and he always held the wrong opinions. He appeared in every role, but for a short period only, without playing the same role for any length of time. In the course of one single month he successively appeared as an alchemist, a fiddler, a statesman, and a clown. Then he showed a wholehearted interest in women, painting, writing verses, and drinking. In addition to all this, he conceived numerous tricks and sports in which he lost interest in the very process of conceiving them. He was a happy madman who could occupy himself every hour with something fresh to desire or to enjoy. In his talk he habitually either condemned or praised people and, in order to show that he was a man of sound judgment, he went to the extreme in both. He was so excessively condemnatory or excessively commendatory that every man was in his eyes either a god or a devil. His peculiar skill lay in recklessly wasting money. He never failed to reward any-

* Or, Because of the same blind instinct for which fate was responsible.....

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On Absalom and wise Achitophel;
Thus wicked but in will, of means bereft,
He left not faction, but of that was left.
Titles and names 'twere tedious to rehearse
Of lords below the dignity of verse.
Wits, warriors, commonwealth's-men were the best:
Kind husbands and mere nobles all the rest.
And therefore in the name of dulness be
The well-hung Balaam and cold Caleb free;
And canting Nadab let oblivion damn
Who made new porridge for the paschal lamb.
Let friendship's holy band some names assure,
Some their own worth, and some let scorn secure.
Nor shall the rascal rabble here have place
Whom kings no titles gave, and God no grace:
Not bull-faced Jonas, who could statutes draw
To mean rebellion and make treason law.
But he, though bad, is followed by a worse,
The wretch who Heaven's anointed dared to curse;
Shimei, whose youth did early promise bring
Of zeal to God and hatred to his King,
Did wisely from expensive sins refrain
And never broke the Sabbath but for gain:
Nor ever was he known an oath to vent
Or curse, unless against the government.
Thus heaping wealth by the most ready way
Among the Jews, which was to cheat and pray,
The City, to reward his pious hate
Against his master, chose him magistrate.
His hand a vare of justice did uphold,
His neck was loaded with a chain of gold.
During his office treason was no crime,
The sons of Belial had a glorious time;
For Shimei, though not prodigal of pelf,
Yet loved his wicked neighbour as himself,
When two or three were gathered to declaim
Against the monarch of Jerusalem,
Shimei was always in the midst of them:
And, if they cursed the King when he was by,
Would rather curse than break good company.
If any durst his factious friends accuse,
He packed a jury of dissenting Jews;
Whose fellow-feeling in the godly cause
Would free the suffering saint from human laws:
For laws are only made to punish those
Who serve the King, and to protect his foes.
If any leisure time he had from power,
Because 'tis sin to misemploy an hour,

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He (Duke of Buckingham), did not leave the party, but it was the party that left him.

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thing except the real smerit of a man. He was reduced to povetry by fools whose real motives he discovered too late. He ridiculed these fools and enjoyed the fun, while they robbed him of his wealth and property. He got expelled from the royal court because of his folly*. Then he tried to compensate himself by forming parties, but he could never become the leader of any party. In spite of every possible effort by him, the burden of conducting the conspiracy fell on the shrewd Earl of Shaftesbury and on the Duke of Monmouth. Thus he was wicked not in action, but in intention only, because he had lost the resources for doing anything. It was not he that left the party (conspiring against the King); it was the party that left him (or, it was the party that brushed him aside and ignored him).

Lines 569—582. It would be tiresome to give a list of the names and titles of other lords (who worked against the King) because a poet would be lowering himself by taking any notice of them. The best of them could be classified as wits, warriors, and supporters of the cause of the Commonwealth. All the others could be described as kind-hearted husbands and persons who belonged to the nobility but had no other qualification. And therefore, in order to avoid the feeling of boredom, the writer of this poem would ignore the Earl of Huntingdon who was a fluent orator†, and Lord Grey of Wark who was callous†† and contemptible. Let Lord Howard of Escrick be also condemned to forgetfulness because this man, on being convicted of high treason, used religious jargon and published a declaration asserting his innocence which he confirmed by taking the sacrament in lamb's wool (that is, ale poured on roasted apples and sugar)‡. Let such persons be remembered for their unholy alliance in betraying the King. Some of them will be remembered because of their own worthlessness, and others because of the scorn they deserve. Nor is there any room in this poem for the rascally crowd who had been blessed neither with any titles by the Crown nor with any grace by God. Let there be no description of Sir William Jones who had the face of a bull and who drew up statutes (namely, the Habeas Corpus Amendment Act, and the Exclusion Bill) to encourage revolt against the King and to provide a legal justification for treason.

Lines 583—628. But although he was a bad man, he was followed by one who was worse, namely, Slingsby Bethel, the wretched fellow who went so far as to curse the divinely appointed King Charles II. This fellow gave signs early in his youth of devoting himself to the worship of God and hating his King. He

* Or, he was dismissed from the royal court because of his foolish plot against the King.

† The expression "well-hung" may also be interpreted as "sexually potent".

†† cold or callous because he allowed the Duke of Monmouth to intrigue with his wife.

‡ "Paschal lamb" is an expression used figuratively for Christ.

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He would write articles to show

His business was by writing to persuade
That kings were useless and a clog to trade: obstruction in trade.
And that his noble style he might refine, to exalt his style of writing
No Rechabite more shunned the fumes of wine. Even excelled Rechab's sons in abstaining wine.
Chaste were his cellars, and his shrieval board
The grossness of a city feast abhorred: Sumptuous dishes were not served at the official parties.
His cooks with long disuse their trade forgot;

Cellars without wine

Cool was his kitchen, though his brains were hot.
Such frugal virtue malice may accuse, Enemies would curse his miserliness but English appreciated as necessary.
But sure 'twas necessary to the Jews:
For towns once burnt such magistrates require
As dare not tempt God's providence by fire.
With spiritual food he fed his servants well,
But free from flesh that made the Jews rebel:
And Moses' laws he held in more account

He fed his servants with spiritual food but he denied them meat or food for the body because that would have made them rebel against him.

x. Moses before pronouncing the Laws of God abstained from food and drink for 40 days.

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was wise enough to refrain from indulging in sins that required the spending of too much money. He never violated the sanctity of Sabbath (or Sunday) except when he could make some money by doing so. Nor had he ever been known to utter an oath or a curse except when he wanted to denounce the government. He accumulated wealth by the easiest method that was known to the English people, namely by cheating and by covering up such activity by a show of piety. The people of London chose him to be one of the sheriffs of their city as a reward for his hatred of the King, a hatred which he thought to be fully justified. He carried in his hand a staff as the badge of his judicial office, while he wore a heavy chain of gold round his neck. During his tenure of office, treachery towards the King was not regarded as a crime, and the descendants of the devil (that is, wicked and sinful people) were able to enjoy themselves fully. Slingsby Bethel, though not liberal in spending money, yet loved the wicked people among the population of London as much as he loved himself. Whenever two or three persons gathered together to denounce the English King, Slingsby Bethel was always to be seen in their midst. And if they cursed the King when Slingsby Bethel was at hand, he would join that good company in cursing the King instead of dispersing them. If anyone dared to bring an accusation against his anti-Royalist friends, he appointed a jury consisting of persons who were themselves opposed to the King and who, because of their sympathy with what they thought to be a holy cause, sentenced the accuser to death thus releasing him from the obligations of human laws. The jury acted in this manner because they believed that laws were made only to punish those who were loyal to the King and to protect those who were hostile to him. If Slingsby Bethel got any leisure time from his busy exercise of official authority, he thought it sinful to misuse that time and so he devoted it to writing articles with the object of convincing people that Kings were useless and that Kings were an obstruction in the way of trade. And, in order that he might further improve his elevated style of writing, he avoided the very smell of wine and thus excelled even the sons of Rechab in abstaining from liquor. He stocked absolutely no wine in his cellars. On this sheriff's dinner-table sumptuous dishes which were popular at city banquets were never served because he thought them to be a sign of coarse or vulgar taste. His cooks, not having been required to cook any delicacies over a long period of time, forgot their cooking skill. No fires burnt in his kitchens, though fires (of hatred for the King) did burn in his brain. His enemies might condemn his miserliness, but surely the English people thought it to be something necessary, because towns which have once suffered the heavy damage caused by a fire need sheriffs who dare not provoke God to punish those towns again with fire. He fed his servants well with spiritual food but he denied them meat or food for the body because that, in his opinion, would have made them rebel against him. He held the laws of Moses to be all the more sacred

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For forty days of fasting in the mount.
To speak the rest, who better are forgot,
Would tire a well-breathed witness of the plot.
Yet, Corah, thou shalt from oblivion pass;
Erect thyself, thou monumental brass,
High as the serpent of thy metal made,
While nations stand secure beneath thy shade.
What though his birth were base, yet comets rise
From earthly vapours, ere they shine in skies.
Prodigious actions may as well be done
By weaver's issue as by prince's son.
This arch-attester for the public good
By that one deed ennobles all his blood.
Who ever asked the witnesses' high race
Whose oath with martyrdom did Stephen grace?
Ours was a Levite, and as times went then,
His tribe were God Almighty's gentlemen.
Sunk were his eyes, his voice was harsh and loud,
Sure signs he neither choleric was nor proud:
His long chin proved his wit, his saint-like grace
A church vermilion and a Moses' face.
His memory, miraculously great,

Could plots exceeding man's belief repeat;
Which therefore cannot be accounted lies,
For human wit could never such devise.
Some future truths are mingled in his book
But where the witness failed, the prophet spoke.
Some things like visionary flights appear;
The spirit caught him up, the Lord knows where;
And gave him his Rabbinical degree
Unknown to foreign University.

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Moses saved his people by asking them to stand under the snake of brass. T.O. by Popish Plot tried to do the same:

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because Moses had, before pronouncing those laws, abstained from food for forty days on the mountain (Mt. Sinai).

Lines 629—645. To speak about the remaining enemies of the King would tire even a person who had witnessed the conspiracy against the King and who had taken sufficient rest. It would be better in any case to allow these persons to be forgotten. Yet one of them, namely, Titus Oates, shall not be allowed to be forgotten. Let this man, who can be described as a monument made of brass,* stand erect. Let him stand erect, looking as high as the serpent of brass erected by Moses. Moses saved his followers from snake-bite by asking them to stand beneath the serpent of brass. Oates claimed that his evidence (to prove the Popish Plot) would save the Protestants from the evil designs of the Roman Catholics.

What did it matter if this man was low-born? After all, comets have their origin in earthly vapours even though afterwards these vapours rise upwards and shine in the sky as comets. Wonderful deeds may be performed by the son of a weaver as well as by the son of a Prince. This principal witness who testified to the Popish Plot, declaring that he did so for the public good, believed that he had exalted himself by that one action. Whoever bothered about the high birth or noble blood of the witnesses when Saint Stephen was sentenced to death on the basis of the false evidence which they gave against him on oath? This witness, namely Titus Oates, was a priest and, according to the beliefs of the time, he and others like him were regarded as the true and respectable children of God Almighty.

Lines 646—659. He had sunken eyes; his voice was loud and jarring; and these were sure signs that he was neither ill-tempered nor proud. He had a long chin which showed that he was witty. He had the ruddy complexion of a parson, and his face, which shone like the face of Moses coming down from the Mount, was a sign of his sanctity (or, lent him a saintly grace). He had a prodigious memory and he [illegible]ld, therefore, relate accounts of plots which were difficu[illegible]es 682—[illegible] listeners to believe (or, which were incredible). But the pl[illegible]e of Mod by him could not be described as lies, because they impatient a[illegible]ave been invented by human ingenuity. His stock of[illegible]rd by the pr[illegible]d certain supposed truths about the future. When h[illegible]ope of attainin eye-witness account of events, it was the prophet [illegible]asp. The commo[illegible] (Or, when he was not giving accounts of events [illegible]ey were surprised [illegible] he made prophecies about the future). Some of [illegible]y gaze l at him[illegible]ed to be flights of pure fancy, and it seemed that h[illegible]otion of him[illegible] the influence of a divine inspiration. God knows h[illegible] a display o[illegible]s inspiration and how he got the degree of Doctor of D[illegible]der to win[illegible]ch he claimed to have got from the University of S[illegible]words to t[illegible]but which was in actual fact a bogus degree.

[illegible]e of the p[illegible] his brazen effrontery or shameless impudence.

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His judgment yet his memory did excel,
Which pieced his wondrous evidence so well
And suited to the temper of the times,
Then groaning under Jebusitic crimes.
Let Israel's foes suspect his heavenly call
And rashly judge his writ apocryphal;
Our laws for such affronts have forfeits made,
He takes his life who takes away his trade.
Were I myself in witness Corah's place,
The wretch who did me such a dire disgrace
Should whet my memory, though once forgot,
To make him an appendix of my plot.
His zeal to Heaven made him his Prince despise,
And load his person with indignities.
But zeal peculiar privilege affords,
Indulging latitude to deeds and words:
And Corah might for Agag's murder call,
In terms as coarse as Samuel used to Saul.
What others in his evidence did join,
The best that could be had for love or coin,
In Corah's own predicament will fall,
For Witness is a common name to all.

Surrounded thus with friends of every sort,
Deluded Absalom forsakes the court;
Impatient of high hopes, urged with renown,
And fired with near possession of a crown.
The admiring crowd are dazzled with surprise
And on his goodly person feel their eyes.
His joy concealed, he sets himself to show,
On each side bowing popularly low,
His looks, his gestures, and his words he frames,
And with familiar ease repeats their names.
Thus formed by nature, furnished out with arts,
He glides unfelt into their secret hearts.
Then with a kind compassionating look,
And sighs, bespeaking pity ere he spoke,
Few words he said, but easy those and fit,

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Lines 660—671. He had a judgment which surpassed even his memory and which enabled him to put together his wonderful evidence so as to suit the temper of the times when people were believed to be groaning under the injustices done by Roman Catholics. Only the enemies of England considered his divine inspiration to be fake, and only these enemies of England were rash enough to describe his pronouncements as false. Under the English laws death has been the punishment for persons who accused a divinely inspired man of falsehood, because depriving a man of the source of his livelihood is tantamount to killing him. If the author were himself in the witness box in place of Titus Oates, he would implicate in the plot any wretched fellow who were to insult him by discrediting his evidence. The author's memory would be sharpened by listening to accusations of falsehood against himself, and he would devise some method of including the accuser in the list of persons guilty of the plot, though he might have to put the accuser's name among the accomplices and not the leading conspirators.

Lines 672—681. This Titus Oates had such an ardent religious zeal that it made him hold his sovereign (Charles II) in contempt and heap insults on the sovereign. But this kind of zeal brings with it a special privilege so that the man having it can claim a certain licence for whatever he wants to say and whatever he wants to do, no matter how guilty his words and deeds might be. Accordingly, Titus Oates contrived the murder of Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey before whom Oates had affirmed on oath his account of the Popish Plot. In instigating the murder of Sir Edmund, Titus Oates must have spoken in the same tone of rebuke as was used by the prophet Samuel when he rebuked Saul for sparing the life of Agag. The others who supported Titus Oates in the evidence that he gave before the magistrate, and these others were the best persons Titus Oates could secure for love or for money, would face the same difficult situation in which Titus Oates found himself, because whoever appears as a witness to support a false case meets the same fate.

Lines 682—697. Thus surrounded by friends of every kind, the Duke of Monmouth was misled into leaving the royal court. He felt impatient about the fulfilment of his high hopes; he was led forward by the prospect of winning fame; and he was inspired by the hope of attaining the crown which seemed already to be in his grasp. The common people were filled with admiration for him. They were surprised and dazzled to see his handsome personality, and they gazed at him with eagerness and joy. He was happy at their reception of him but, concealing his happiness, he proceeded to make a display of himself, bending low on every side to the crowd in order to win popularity. He adapted his looks, his gestures and his words to the requirements of the situation, and he addressed some of the people by their names as if he had been on familiar terms

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More slow than Hybla-drops and far more sweet:
"I mourn, my countrymen, your lost estate,
"Though far unable to prevent your fate:
"Behold a banished man, for your dear cause
"Exposed a prey to arbitrary laws!
"Yet oh that I alone could be undone,
"Cut off from empire, and no more a son!
"Now all your liberties a spoil are made,
"Egypt and Tyrus intercept your trade,
"And Jebusites your sacred rites invade.
"My father, whom with reverence yet I name,
"Charmed into ease, is careless of his fame,
"And, bribed with petty sums of foreign gold,
"Is grown in Bathsheba's embraces old;
"Exalts his enemies, his friends destroys,
"And all his power against himself employs,
"He gives, and let him give, my right away;
"But why should he his own and yours betray?
"He, only he can make the nation bleed,
"And he alone from my revenge is freed.
"Take then my tears (with that he wiped his eyes),
"'Tis all the aid my present power supplies:
"No court-informer can these arms accuse;
"These arms may sons against their fathers use.

"And 'tis my wish, the next successor's reign
"May make no other Israelite complain."
Youth, beauty, graceful action seldom fail,
But common interest always will prevail;
And pity never ceases to be shown
To him who makes the people's wrongs his own.
The crowd that still believe their kings oppress
With lifted hands their young Messiah bless:
Who now begins his progress to ordain
With chariots, horsemen, and a numerous train;

From east to west his glories he displays,
And, like the sun, the promised land surveys.
Fame runs before him as the morning star,
And shouts of joy salute him from afar;
Each house receives him as a guardian god,
And consecrates the place of his abode.
But hospitable treats did most commend
Wise Issachar, his wealthy western friend.
This moving court that caught the people's eyes,

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with them and had no difficulty in recalling them. Endowed with a handsome personality by Nature, and employing all the devices by which one becomes popular, the Duke of Monmouth made his way into the hearts of the people without their becoming conscious of the spell he was binding on them. Then, with a kind look indicative of sympathy, and with pitiful sighs, he spoke to them. He spoke only a few words, but those words were spoken in natural tones and they suited the occasion. His words flowed from his lips more slowly than drops of honey flow from Hybla bee-hives, and his words were far more sweet. This is what he said :

Lines 698—722. "My countrymen ! I feel sorry for the loss of prestige and privilege that you have suffered, though I have been absolutely unable to prevent your evil fate. Look at me, a banished* man, subjected to arbitrary punishment by the King for having taken up the dear cause of your welfare. Yet it is my wish that I alone had been the victim of the King's injustice. I would not mind being deprived of my claim as the heir to the throne or being disowned as a son by the King. But the pity is that you too have suffered. You have been deprived of all your liberties. France and Holland have usurped your trade, and Roman Catholics make it impossible for you to observe your sacred religious ceremonies. My father, whose name even now I mention with the deepest respect, seems to have fallen under some spell and is leading a life of ease, regardless of his reputation. He is bribed with petty sums of foreign money and he has grown old in the embraces of his mistress, the Duchess of Portsmouth. He is raising his enemies to high positions; He is ruining his friends; and in this way he is using all his authority against his own interests. He is distributing favours, and I do not mind if he gives away my right to somebody else. But he has no business to betray his own rights and your rights. He, only he, has the power to make the nation suffer, and he is the only one whom I will not try to punish for his crimes against the nation. Under the circumstances, all that I can give you is my tears of sympathy", (and saying this he wiped his eyes). "These tears are the only help which, with my present resources, I can offer you. These tears are like harmless weapons to which no court spy can object. Such innocent weapons can justly be used by sons against their fathers. It is my wish that when the next claimant to the throne becomes the King of England, no Englishman should have any reason to complain."

Lines 723—738. Youth, beauty, and graceful action seldom fail to produce an effect, but an appeal in the name of common interest is bound to sway the crowd. A man, who espouses the cause of the people and speaks as if the wrongs done to them were wrongs done to himself, will always win the people's sympathy and support. The common people (who have always believed that monarchs are

* a banished man because Charles had exiled Monmouth to Holland.

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Though it seemed the idea behind was show - it had something hidden -

And seemed but pomp, did other ends disguise;

Achitophel had formed it, with intent on purpose

To sound the depths and fathom, where it went, to see the depth & measure the reaction -

supporters opposers

The people's hearts, distinguish friends from foes,

And try their strength before they came to blows.

all was shaped with the pretence

Yet all was coloured with a smooth pretence

Of specious love and duty to their prince. mark of support to Charles -

Religion and redress of grievances, Course of action is defended first by religion & then by redressal of grievances -

Two names that always cheat and always please,

Are often urged; and good king David's life

Endangered by a brother and a wife. It was afloat the queen

Duke of York, Conspiring against the King -

Thus in a pageant show a plot is made, Duke of Yorks procession a camouflage

And peace itself is war in masquerade. Preparation of war in the guise of peace -

Oh foolish Israel ! never warned by ill !

Still the same bait, and circumvented still ! Freedom from despotic rule -

Did ever men farsake their present ease, Did they ever forestake pleasure -

In midst of health imagine a disease, When healthy never imagined disease -

Have they seen mischiefs yet to be plotted -

Take pains contingent mischiefs to foresee,

Make heirs for monarchs, and for God decree ? Proclaimed heirs for God's ordinances -

What shall we think ? Can people give away

Both for themselves and sons their native sway ?

Can people give away the right to rule for their own and son's sake

Then they are left defenceless to the sword Then they shall be defenceless

Of each unbounded, arbitrary lord; against arbitary rule of king.

And laws are vain by which we right enjoy,

If kings unquestioned can those laws destroy.

Laws shall be of no avail if kings are allowed to destroy the laws -

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tyrannical) raised their hands to bless the Duke of Monmouth whom they regarded as their saviour. The Duke of Monmouth now set out on a state journey, accompanied by attendants in carriages and on horse-back, and a large number of followers. He went from east to west in order to exhibit his splendour and, like the sun, surveyed the land which he hoped to rule. His fame preceded him wherever he went just as the morning star shone there in anticipation of his arrival. People would shout joyfully to welcome and greet him even though he was yet far from the place he was to visit. Each family greeted him as its protective deity, and every house where he stayed was regarded as having been sanctified by his stay. But the greatest hospitality was shown to him by Thomas Thynne, his wealthy friend who lived in the western part of the kingdom.

Lines 739—746. The procession attracted much public notice. It seemed that a royal court was moving from place to place. Although it seemed that the idea behind the procession was merely to create an impression of pomp and show, it had certain hidden aims. The Earl of Shaftesbury had planned it with the object of assessing the inmost feelings of the people's hearts whereve it went and of judging people's reactions to the Duke of Monmouth. The Earl of Shaftesbury wanted to find out who would support and who would oppose the claims of the Duke of Monmouth to kingship. He wanted to measure the strength of both the supporters and the opponents before he actually started a civil war. Yet the whole thing had been given the false appearance of having been organised as a mark of support and loyalty to King Charles II.

Lines 747—752. In such cases a course of action is defended firstly in the name of religion and secondly on the ground that people's grievances are being redressed. People are always pleased and deceived when an appeal is made to them in these two causes. It was given out that the life of King Charles II was in danger because of a conspiracy hatched by his wife, the Queen, and his brother, the Duke of York. Thus the Duke of Monmouth's entire procession was a camouflage for a plot against the King. What seemed to be a harmless and peaceful pageant was actually a cover for the war that the Earl of Shaftesbury wanted to wage against the King.

Lines 753—764. It is a pity that the foolish people of England have never heeded a warning of evil that is coming ; they have always been trapped and cheated by the same deceptive promise of freedom from despotic rule. Have people ever given up their existing state of comfort ? Have they ever imagined a disease when they are in a state of good health ? Have they ever taken pains to anticipate mischiefs which are yet to be plotted and have they ever set up claimants to the throne and proclaimed divine ordinances ? What are we to think of the behaviour of the people ? Is it

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If people are to be regarded as the judges of what is right or wrong -

Yet if the crowd be judge of fit and just,
And kings are only officers in trust, trustees.
Then this resuming covenant was declared when kings were first appointed
When kings were made, or is for ever barred. (Those who gave power to
If those who gave the sceptre could not tie rule to the king bound
By their own deed their own posterity, their future generations to him

The case is similar to Adam who bound his decendants -

How then could Adam bind his future race ?
How could his forfeit on mankind take place ? all mankind had to
Or how could heavenly justice damn us all suffer the penalties imposed
Who ne'er consented to our father's fall ? on adam without our consent
Then kings are slaves to those whom they command slaves to people -
And tenants to their people's pleasure stand. to rule according to wishes & whims of people -
Add that the power, for property allowed, add to the political authority the right to property which they shall misuse -
Is mischievously seated in the crowd;
For who can be secure of private right,
If sovereign sway may be dissolved by might ?

If this is not accepted

If the authority of the king can be wrecked by the power of the mob who can feel secure of private right.

Nor is the people's judgment always true :
The most may err as grossly as the few, majority may error as the few who rule -
And faultless kings run down by common cry
For vice, oppression, and for tyranny. Sinful, cruel and tyrannical.
What standard is there in a fickle rout, code of conduct - inconsistent
Which, flowing to the mark, runs faster out ? mob ebbs as quick as it rises.
Nor only crowds but Sanhedrins may be
Infected with this public lunacy, may be infected with public madness.
And share the madness of rebellious times,
To murder monarchs for imagined crimes

Parliament

To kill monarchs on flimsy issues -

If they may give and take whene'er they please, if mobs give & take away power -
Not kings alone, the Godhead's images,
But government itself at length must fall
To nature's state, where all have right to all. To a state of nature where all shall demand all.
Yet grant our lords, the people, kings can make,
What prudent men a settled throne would shake ? no wise man - shall dislodge a king firmly seated -
For whatsoe'er their suffeirngs were before,
That change they covet makes them suffer more. They will suffer more -
All other errors but disturb a state,
But innovation is the blow of fate.

State of Nature -

Revolution

All other misdeeds merely create a disturbance in the state - Revolution gives it a fatal blow =

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possible for people to give away, both on their own behalf and on behalf of their sons, their inborn right to rule ? If it is possible for them to do so, they will have no defence left against the power and might of an ambitious, despotic ruler who aims at unlimited authority. If Kings are allowed to exercise unquestioned authority to scrap the laws of the land, people will lose the rights which they are able to enjoy under those laws.

Lines 765—784. At the same time, if the people are to be regarded as the judges of what is right and fair, and if Kings are merely the trustees of the people's rights, then this should have been made clear when Kings were first appointed, and, failing that, people are for ever excluded from the right to re-assert their authority. Those, who originally entrusted the duties and powers of kingship to an incumbent, meant also to bind their descendants to their deed. The case is similar to that of Adam, the consequences of whose deed became inescapable for Adam's descendants. Adam committed a fault which led to his expulsion from the Garden of Eden. All mankind has to suffer the penalties imposed on Adam by God (for Adam's disobedience). All mankind is condemned to suffer the divine punishment to which Adam was subjected as a result of his sin, even though mankind had not consented to that punishment. If this position be not accepted, then Kings will become the subordinates of those whom they are supposed to rule. The Kings will then have to act in accordance with the wishes and whims of the people. Add to this the fact that the political power which goes with the possession of property will also be controlled by the mob who are likely to misuse it. If the authority of a King can be wrecked by the power of the mob, who can feel secure of his private rights ? Nor is it possible to assert that the judgment of the people is always correct. The majority is liable to commit errors which are as serious as those that are committed by a small ruling group of persons, and even Kings who are perfect are likely to be condemned by the voice of the mob as being sinful, cruel, and tyrannical.

Lines 785—800. What code of conduct can we expect from the inconstant mob which, after trying to attain an objective by all-out efforts, quickly exhausts and wastes itself*. Not only a mob, but parliaments may be infected with this general madness and, losing the equilibrium of their minds under the influence of the rebellious attitude of the crowds, get ready to murder monarchs on a charge of having committed imaginary crimes. If mobs have the authority to give power to Kings and take it away from them according to their whims, not only will Kings (who are the representatives and viceroys of God and wield authority in God's name) fall, but the government itself must eventually disintegrate and be followed by a state of nature (or state of savagery) in which all people will have the right to claim all things. Yet, assuming that the people are the masters and have the power to appoint kings, no far-sighted or

* The higher the tide, the more rapid is the fall of water at the ebb.

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If ancient fabrics nod and threat to fall,
To patch the flaws and buttress up the wall,
Thus far 'tis duty : but here fix the mark ;
For all beyond it is to touch our ark.
To change foundations, cast the frame anew,
Is work for rebels who base ends pursue,
At once divine and human laws control,
And mend the parts by ruin of the whole.
The tampering world is subject to this curse.
To physic their disease into a worse.

Now what relief can righteous David bring ?
How fatal 'tis to be too good a king !
Friends he has few, so high the madness grows;
Who dare be such must be the people's foes.
Yet some there were even in the worst of days;
Some let me name, and naming is to praise.

In this short file Barzillai first appears,
Barzillai, crowned with honour and with years.
Long since the rising rebels he withstood
In regions waste beyond the Jordan's flood :

Unfortunately brave to buoy the state,
But sinking underneath his master's fate.
In exile with his godlike prince he mourned,
For him he suffered, and with him returned.
The court he practised, not the courtier's art
Large was his wealth, but larger was his heart,
Which well the noblest objects knew to choose,
The fighting warrior, and recording Muse.
His bed could once a fruitful issue boast;
Now more than half a father's name is lost.

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wise group of men would try to dislodge a king who is firmly established and who maintains a stability in the country, because, whatever their sufferings might be during his regime, the change that they desire to bring about will merely add to their sufferings. All other political misdeeds merely cause a disturbance in the country, but a revolution proves a fatal blow to its security.

Lines 801—810. If ancient structures have become shaky and seem to be on the verge of collapse, it is the duty of the people to repair the damage and to reinforce the supporting walls, but their duty ends here and to go beyond this point is to commit an impiety. To change the foundations and to re-structure the edifice is the work of rebels who have mean and selfish motives and who bend both human and divine laws to their own purpose and commit the folly of repairing the parts by wrecking the whole. People who trespass the limit of their authority are subject to this curse that, in trying to treat their disease, they become the victims of a worse disease.

Lines 811—816. Now what relief could the just and fair-minded King Chales II offer ? It is suicidal for a King to be too good. Chales II had few friends because the madness of rebellion had acquired huge proportions. Whoever dared to profess a friendship for the King, was necessarily regarded as the enemy of the people. In spite of that, the King had some supporters even in his worst days. The poet would like to name some of them, and by naming them to pay his tribute to them.

Lines 817—830. The name of the Duke of Ormonde appears on the top of this short list of the King's supporters. The Duke of Ormonde had won honours and was a man of ripe age. Long before this time he had brought under his control the mutinous people of the barren territory of Ireland when he was the Governor there. He was a brave man who sustained and strengthened the State but whose position was greatly undermined as a result of the weakening of the authority of his King. He had shared the sufferings of Charles (whom he regarded as a King by divine right) in the latter's years of exile. He had suffered with Charles and he had returned to England with Charles. He frequented the court but he did not practise the arts of a courtier. (He attended upon the King at the court but he was not a flatterer or a hypcrite). He was a man of enormous wealth, but his heart was larger than even his wealth. He had the discrimination to select the noblest objects for his attention and affection. He showed his favours to the war-like soldiers and to poets and other men of letters whose function it is to record events. He could once have made the proud claim that he had begotten a large number of children, but by this time he had lost more than half of his progeny.

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His eldest hope, with every grace adorned,
By me, so Heaven will have it, always mourned
And always honoured, snatched in manhood's prime
By unequal fates and Providence's crime:
Yet not before the goal of honour won,
All parts fulfilled of subject and of son;
Swift was the race, but short the time to run.
Oh narrow circle, but of power divine,
Scanted in space, but perfect in thy line!
By sea, by land, thy matchless worth was known,

Arms thy delight, and war was all thy own:
Thy force infused the fainting Tyrians propped;
And haughty Pharaoh found his fortune stopped.
Oh ancient honour! oh unconquered hand,
Whom foes unpunished never could withstand!
But Israel was unworthy of the name:
Short is the date of all immoderate fame.
It looks as heaven our ruin had designed,
And durst not trust thy fortune and thy mind.
Now, free from earth, thy disencumbered soul
Mounts up, and leaves behind the clouds and starry pole:
From thence thy kindred legions mayest thou bring
To aid the guardian angel of thy King.
Here stop, my Muse, here cease thy painful flight;
No pinions can pursue immortal height:
Tell good Barzillai thou canst sing no more,
And tell thy soul she should have fled before:
Or fled she with his life, and left this verse
To hang on her departed patron's hearse?
Now take thy steepy flight from heaven, and see
If thou canst find on earth another he:
Another he would be too hard to find;
See then whom thou canst see not far behind.

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(Describes the Earl of Ossory)
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Lines 831 – 843. His eldest child was Thomas, Earl of Ossory, who was adorned with every grace. This son of the Duke of Ormonde was snatched away in the very prime of his life by God's cruelty and by Fates who treat human beings unequally*. By the will of heaven, the poet always mourned the death of this young man and always honoured his memory. However, the Earl of Ossory did not die before winning his honourable goal and before fulfilling all his duties as a son and as a loyal subject. He had rapidly won distinctions, but heaven had allowed him only a short period of time to distinguish himself. He distinguished himself in a narrow sphere, but the distinction that he won had a divine quality. The time given to him was very short, but in this short period he was able to attain perfection. His unique qualities became known because of the battles that he fought both on sea and on land. To wield weapons was a source of delight for him, and he was in his element when fighting in a battle. When he added his strength to the exhausted Dutch forces, they felt strong again, and he was able to stop the progress of the arrogant French King, Louix XIV, who was proving too powerful for the Dutch (in the campaign of 1678).

Lines 844—853. The Earl of Ossory had in him the ancient sense of honour. He remained unconquered in battle. His enemies could never fight against him without being severely mauled. But England did not deserve a man of his rare qualities. All those who win excessive fame have short lives. It seemed as if heaven had planned to ruin the English nation and could not therefore allow a man of the calibre of the Earl of Ossory to remain alive to rescue his country. With his death his soul became free from the toils of the earth and from the prison of his body. His liberated soul soared upwards, beyond the clouds and the starry regions. From there his soul might bring a huge number of similar souls to help the guardian angel of King Charles.

Lines 854—863. Here the poet would like to stop speaking of the Earl of Ossory. The poet would not like to continue to write about the Earl of Ossory, because it is a painful exercise and also because it is not possible with earthly wings to pursue a soul which is soaring heaven-wards. The poet would like to tell the good Duke of Ormonde that he cannot write any more elegiac verses in memory of the Duke's son. The poet wishes that his own soul had departed from his body to accompany the soul of the Earl of Ossory. Or, perhaps, the poet's soul did actually depart in the company of the soul of the Earl of Ossory, leaving these elegiac verses to hang on the coffin of the dead Earl as the poet's tribute to his departed patron. The poet would now like to return from his steep flight into heaven and see if he can find some other man on the earth comparable to the departed Earl of Ossory. It would be

*_unequal fates_—unjust fate ; unjust providence.

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Archbishop of Canterbury

Zadoc the priest, whom, shunning power and place,
His lowly mind advanced to David's grace.
With him the Sagan of Jerusalem,
Of hospitable soul and noble stem;
Him of the western dome, whose weighty sense
Flows in fit words and heavenly eloquence.
The Prophets' sons, by such example led,
To learning and to loyalty were bred:
For colleges on bounteous kings depend,
And never rebel was to arts a friend.
To these succeed the pillars of the laws,
Who best could plead, and best can judge a cause;
Next them a train of loyal peers ascend
Sharp judging Adriel, the Muses' friend,
Himself a Muse: in Sanhedrin's debate;
True to his Prince, but not a slave of state;
Whom David's love with honours did adorn
That from his disobedient son were torn.
Jotham of piercing wit and pregnant thought,
Endued by nature and by learning taught
To move assemblies, who but only tried
The worse a while, then chose the better side,
Nor chose alone, but turned the balance too,
So much the weight of one brave man can do.
Hushai, the friend of David in distress,
In public storms of manly steadfastness;
By foreign treaties he informed his youth
And joined experience to his native truth.
His frugal care supplied the wanting throne,
Frugal for that, but bounteous of his own
'Tis easy conduct when exchequers flow,
But hard the task to manage well the low.
For sovereign power is too depressed or high,
When kings are forced to sell or crowds to buy.

Archbishop of Canterbury
avoided power and place because of his modesty
Hospitable nature
Noble Stock
Real weighty ideas and expressions
Heavenly eloquence
Rebel against the King never be Patron of arts
Poet & Master of Letters
Charles had out of his love adorned this man after taking away the Sons from his disobedient Son
Master of Halifax
Worse Party for a while
Earl of Rochester
Lord Treasurer
Economy in Public money

Kings grace by modesty
Henry Compton, Bishop of London
Dean of Westminsters
Westminsters
Influenced by the Dean
Learning & devotion to King
Colleges depend on large liberalness of Kings
Next Lawyers & Judges
Earl of Mulgrave - a man of keen and penetrating judgment
Himself a friend
Parliamentary debate
Shewed loyalty to the King
not Sl airs
Supporter of the government
Gifted by nature & taught by learning to influence
Then chose King's Party
instrumental in defeating Exclusion Bill
of firm convictions
He had enriched his youth by negotiating foreign treaties
Supplement his unborn loyalty with diplomatic experience
Economy - money to Private
large liberality in spending own

The power of King declines when he is compelled to part with his privileges for money & the power of the King increases when the people feel compelled to buy his favours

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1) William Sancroft

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too difficult to find another man exactly like the Earl of Ossory. The poet would therefore try to find somebody who is not far behind the departed Earl in respect of his abilities and talents.

Lines 864—881. There was William Sancroft, the Archbishop of Canterbury, who avoided power and position because of his modesty, and who had won the favour of the King by his humility. Then there was Henry Compton, the Bishop of London, who came of a noble stock and who had a hospitable nature. There was John Dolben, the Dean of Westminster, whose weighty ideas found expression in appropriate words and who was a preacher of heavenly eloquence. The Westminster schoolboys, led by the example of this Dean, developed a love of learning and a devotion to their King as they grew up, because colleges* depend on the large-heartedness of Kings, and no man who rebels against his king could ever be a lover or patron of the arts. Next came the advocates and the judges who were best fitted to pronounce judgments because they were most competent as lawyers. Then came a large number of loyal peers, firm in their support to the King. There was the Earl of Mulgrave, a man of keen and penetrating judgment, a patron of poets and men of letters, and himself a poet. This man showed his loyalty to the King in the course of parliamentary debates but he was by no means a slavish supporter of the government. King Charles had, out of his love for this man, conferred upon him titles and honours which he had snatched away from his disobedient son, the Duke of Monmouth.

Lines 882—897. Next came George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, who was a man of piercing wit and fertile thinking, who had been gifted by nature and taught by learning to influence and sway audiences. This man sided with the erring party only for a short time and soon afterwards became a supporter of the better party (that is, the King's Party). He not only became a supporter of the right party, but was instrumental in defeating the Exclusion Bill in the House of Lords thus showing what wonderful results the support of one strong man can achieve. There was Laurence Hyde, Earl of Rochester, Charles's friend in distress and a man of firm determination in furious public controversies and agitations. He had enriched his youth by negotiating treaties with foreign countries, and had thus supplemented his inborn loyalty with diplomatic experience. As First Lord of the Treasury, he had exercised great economy in public expenditure and supplied money to the needy King. He followed a policy of economy in public expenditure and yet showed a large-heartedness in spending his own money. It is easy to be generous when the public treasury is full of money, but it is a very difficult task to manage public finances when much money is not available. The power of a King declines when he is compelled to barter away his privileges for money, and the power of a King increases when the people feel compelled to buy his favours.

* colleges—preachers, priests, scholars, etc.

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Indulge one labour more, my weary Muse,
For Amiel : who can Amiel's praise refuse ?
Of ancient race by birth, but noble yet
In his own worth and without title great :
The Sanhedrin long time as chief he ruled,
Their reason guided and their passion cooled :
So dexterous was he in the Crown's defence,
So formed to speak a loyal nation's sense,
That, as their band was Israel's tribes in small,
So fit was he to represent them all.
Now rasher charioteers the seat ascend,
Whose loose careers his steady skill commend :
They, like the unequal ruler of the day,
Misguide the seasons and mistake the way,
While he, withdrawn, at their mad labour smiles
And safe enjoys the sabbath of his toils.
These were the chief, a small but faithful band
Of worthies in the breach who dared to stand
And tempt the united fury of the land.
With grief they viewed such powerful engines bent
To batter down the lawful government.
A numerous faction, with pretended frights,
In Sanhedrins to plume the regal rights;
The true successor from the Court removed;
The plot by hireling witnesses improved.
These ills they saw, and, as their duty bound,
They showed the King the danger of the wound;
That no concessions from the throne would please,
But lenitives fomented the disease;
That Absalom, ambitious of the crown,
Was made the lure to draw the people down;
That false Achitophel's pernicious hate
Had turned the plot to ruin Church and State;
The council violent, the rabble worse;
That Shimei taught Jerusalem to curse.

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Lines 898—913. The poet, though feeling somewhat tired of the labour of writing this poem, would like to perform one more task, and that is the task of describing Edward Seymour (wo had been the Speaker of the House of Commons from 1673 to 1679). Nobody can refuse to pay a tribute to this man. A nobleman by birth, he came of an ancient family, but he was nobler still by virtue of his own abilities. He was a great man, even though he had no titles, He ruled the parliament as its Speaker for a long time and, in that capacity, he showed the right path to the reasoning faculty of the members and cooled their tempers when passions ran high. He was so skilful in defending the King, and so able to give expression to the loyalty of the nation that, just as the parliament represented all sections of the English population in miniature, he was fit to represent the entire Parliament. After he retired, the Speakers who followed him had rash natures, so that his steadiness and skill acquired a greater value by contrast with the unrestrained conduct of his successors. His successors were unable to guide the parliament properly and were incapable of forming proper judgments. They could be compared to Phaeton who was unable properly to drive the chariot of the sun, thereby creating a confusion in the seasons. Edward Seymour felt amused to see the wild and vain labours of his successors and safely enjoyed the rest which he had earned on retiring from the hard duties of his office as Speaker.

Lines 914—932. These were the principal supporters of the King. They were a small but faithful group of worthy gentlemen. They had the courage to form a line of defence against the attack of the united mob of people who were opposed to the King. These loyal men felt grieved to see such powerful forces bent upon toppling the legally constituted government. The King's opponents were a large party who tried in parliament to deprive the King of his rights and privileges on the basis of pretended fears that the King would misuse his authority. This party removed from the court the rightful heir to the throne and lent greater credibility to the Popish Plot by producing witnesses who had been hired by them. The King's supportes saw these mal-practices and, in accordance with the dictates of their duty, they informed the King of the danger which he was facing. They told him that no concessions offered by him would satisfy his opponents and that any lenient measures taken by him would have the effect of merely encouraging the rebels to increase their opposition. They pointed out that the Duke of Monmouth, who was ambitious of succeeding to the throne, was being used by the rebels as a bait to turn the people against their King. The treacherous Earl of Shaftesbury's wicked hatred of the King had resulted in the Popish Plot being used for the purpose of wrecking both the church and the government in the country. Parliament had become aggressive and the common people were in an even worse mood. Slingsby Bethel* had ben instigating the population of London to curse the King.

*He was the sheriff of London and had been preaching hatred against the King.

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Charles was weighed down on by the burden of all these wrongs being done to him

With all these loads of injuries opprest,
And long revolving in his careful breast
The event of things, at last his patience tired,
Thus from his royal throne, by Heaven inspired,
The godlike David spoke; with awful fear
His train their Maker in their master hear.
"Thus long have I, by native mercy swayed,
"My wrongs dissembled, my revenge delayed:
"So willing to forgive the offending age;
"So much the father did the king assuage.
"But now so far my clemency they slight,
"The offenders question my forgiving right.
"That one was made for many, they contend;
"But 'tis to rule, for that's a monarch's end.
"They call my tenderness of blood my fear,
"Though manly tempers can the longest bear.
"Yet since they will divert my native course,
"'Tis time to show I am not good by force.
"Those heaped affronts that haughty subjects bring,
"Are burdens for a camel, not a king.
"Kings are the public pillars of the State,
"Born to sustain and prop the nation's weight:
"If my young Samson will pretend a call
"To shake the column, let him share the fall;
But oh that yet he would repent and live!
"How easy 'tis for parents to forgive!
"With how few tears a pardon might be won
"From nature, pleading for a darling son!
"Poor pitied youth, by my paternal care
"Raised up to all the height his frame could bear!
"Had God ordained his fate for empire born,
"He would have given his soul another turn:
"Gulled with a patriot's name, whose modern sense
"Is one that would by law supplant his prince;
"The people's brave, the politician's tool;
"Never was patriot yet but was a fool.

anxious mind long pondering over the outcome of things:
Patience & Ramsdad
Inspired by Heaven
His followers in a State of awe and fear heard the voice of God -
Influenced by inborn merciful nature -
willingly forgiving & warning doors
allowing my faithful feelings
to soften my anger -
my authority to pardon them -
one king was made for many.
the function of the king was
to rule over the people -
Brave by temperament can bear wrongs -
I am not good to them under continual sions -
the insult of subjects
are fit to carried by camel & King -
Kings are intended to shoulder the weight of the State -
Judges 3:4:5
Should repent his folly & escape death -
By shedding tears it seems that Nature pleads the cause -
Shared have been a legitimate one -
Gulled for assuming a Patriot - justifies his Lord to depose his King -

Overlooking my wrongs

Duke of Monmouth

my Poor Monmouth is to be pitied at his condition

fooled

Anyone who has ever called himself a Patriot was actually a fool -

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Lines 933—938, King Charles II was weighed down by the burden of all these wrongs which were being done to him. His anxious mind had long been pondering over the outcome of things. At last his patience was exhausted and, inspired by heaven, the God-like King thus spoke from his royal throne. His followers, in a state of awe and fear, heard the voice of God in what their King said :

Lines 939—968. "Influenced by my inborn merciful nature I have for a long time been overlooking the wrongs done to me and have been postponing my revenge upon the wrong-doers. I have willingly been forgiving those who gave me offence, allowing my fatherly feelings for the wrong-doers to soften my anger as the King. But now my opponents hold my forgiveness so much in contempt that the very culprits question my authority to pardon them. They hotly argue that one man was made the King for the benefit of the many (people) ; but they do not realise that the function of a King is to rule over the people. They misinterpret my mild disposition as fear, and they forget that a man who is brave by temperament can endure wrongs for the longest time. Yet, now that they are bent upon diverting me from the course which I, under the influence of my nature, have been adopting, the time has come to prove that I am not good to them under any compulsion. The insults which the arrogant subjects heap upon a King are a fit burden for a camel to carry, but no King will tolerate them. Kings are like the public pillars of the State, and they are born to bear and support the nation's weight (or, they are born to shoulder and carry out the responsibility of administering the State.) If my young son, the Duke of Monmouth, pretends that, like the brave Samson, he has been urged by heaven to shake the pillar (of the State), let him then get ready to be crushed under the pillar which he will bring down. But it is my wish that he should repent of his folly and thus escape death. Parents find it very easy to pardon their erring children. An erring son has only to shed a few tears of repentance, and it seems to the parents that Nature itself is pleading the case of their darling son whom the parents then gladly forgive. My poor Monmouth is to be pitied at his wretched condition. Under my paternal care he was raised to the highest position of which he could carry the burden. Had it been God's will that he should rule an empire, God would have given his soul a different shape (or, God would have ensured a legitimate birth for him). He has been fooled by the people who have given him the name of a patriot. The common or vulgar meaning of the word "patriot" is one who feels justified by law to depose his King. A "patriot" is willing to act as a hired assassin at the bidding of the people, and to be used as a tool by the politicians. Any one who has ever called himself a patriot was actually a fool.

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"Whence comes it that religion and the laws
"Should more be Absalom's than David's cause?

"His old instructor, ere he lost his place,
"Was never thought endued with so much grace.
"Good heavens, how faction can a patriot paint!
"My rebel ever proves my people's saint.
"Would they impose an heir upon the throne?
"Let Sanhedrins be taught to give their own.
"A king's at least a part of government,
"And mine as requisite as their consent:
"Without my leave a future king to choose
"Infers a right the present to depose.

"True, they petition me to approve their choice;
"But Esau's hands suit ill with Jacob's voice.
"My pious subjects for my safety pray,
"Which to secure, they take my power away.
"From plots and treasons Heaven preserve my years,
"But save me most from my petitioners
"Unsatiate as the barren womb or grave
"God cannot grant so much as they can crave.
"What then is left but with a jealous eye
"To guard the small remains of royalty?

"The law shall still direct my peaceful sway,
"And the same law teach rebels to obey:
"Votes shall no more established power control,
"Such votes as make a part exceed the whole.
"No groundless clamours shall my friends remove
"Nor crowds have power to punish ere they prove;
"For gods and godlike kings their care express
"Still to defend their servants in distress.
"Oh that my power to saving were confined!
"Why am I forced, like Heaven, against my mind
"To make examples of another kind?
"Must I at length the sword of justice draw?
"O curst effects of necessary law!
"How ill my fear they by my mercy scan!
"Beware the fury of a patient man.
"Law they require, let Law then show her face;
They could not be content to look on Grace,
"Her hinder parts, but with a daring eye

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Jacob deceived his father by putting on goat skin on his hands and making him think he was Esau

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Lines 969—998. What is the origin of the view that religion and the laws are more my son's concern than my own ? The old Earl of Shaftesbury, who is instigating the Duke of Monmouth, was never thought to be endowed with so much grace before I dismissed him from his high position, as now. It is surprising how a political group of people can depict such a man as a patriot. The man who rebels against the King is always worshipped by the people as their saint. Do my opponents in parliament wish to thrust an heir upon the throne ? Let me then teach parliament that they can give only what is theirs to give. At the very least a King is a part of the government, and my consent (to their proposal) is therefore as necessary as theirs. If they claim the right to choose their next King without my consent, it means that they have also the right to remove the present King. It is true that they have prayed to me to approve their choice (of the next King), but this is sheer hypocrisy like that practised by Jacob who deceived his blind father by wearing goat-skin on his hands and making him think that it was Esau, his hairy brother. It is strange that my subjects, who believe themselves to be pious, pray for my safety and, in order to ensure my safety, try to take my royal power away from me. May heaven protect my old age against plots and treacheraus conspiracies, but I need an even greater protection against those who pretend to be my petitioners and who always remain unsatisfied like the barren womb or the grave. God can never grant them as much as they desire. (or, their desires are unlimited and they can never be satisfied no matter how much God gives them). What then is left for me except to exercise vigilance and to protect what little yet remains with me of royal authority ? I shall still follow the law in peacefully ruling the country, and I shall teach my opponents to obey the same law. Members of parliment should no more be allowed to control the established authority of the King by a majority of votes, because it cannot be decided by voting that a part is greater than the whole (or, that the people should be more powerful than their King). I shall not remove my supporters from their high positions just because there are noisy and baseless demands for their removal. Nor shall I allow mobs to have the power to punish without proving that punishment is deserved. Gods, and Kings who derive their authority from Gods, are anxious to defend their faithful followers in distress.

Lines 999—1025. I wish that there were limits to my power of pardon. Why should I be compelled, like God, to inflict, against my will, exemplary punishment on my enemies ? Must I at last meet the demands of justice by punishing my opponents ? To enforce the law is a necessary duty for me, and its enforcement inevitably leads to certain evil consequences for the wrong-doers. How mistaken my enemies are in interpreting my forgiveness as fear ! When a patient man's limit of endurance is reached, his fury knows no bounds. My enemies demand the enforcement of the law; let them then see

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"To tempt the terror of her front and die.
"By their own arts, 'tis righteously decreed,
"Those dire artificers of death shall bleed,
"Against themselves their witnesses will swear
"Till, viper-like, their mother-plot they tear,
"And suck for nutriment that bloody gore
"Which was their principle of life before.
"Their Belial with their Beelzebub will fight ;
"Thus on my foes my foes shall do me right.
"Nor doubt the event ; for factious crowds engage
"In their first onset all their brutal rage.
"Then let them take an unresisted course ;
"Retire and traverse, and delude their force :
"But when they stand all breathless, urge the fight
"And rise upon them with redoubled might :
"For lawful power is still superior found,
"When long driven back at length it stands the ground."
He said. The Almighty, nodding, gave consent ;
And peals of thunder shook the firmament.
Henceforth a series of new time began,
The mighty years in long procession ran ;
Once more the godlike David was restored,
And willing nations knew their lawful lord.

—o—o—

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the true face of the law. They have not felt satisfied with the rear view of the law, which consisted in my mercy towards them. They have been reckless enough to demand to see the front view of the law. Let them see the front view and meet their destruction because the front view means justice which is terrible and relentless. Rightly has it been decreed that these people, who plot the death of others by their grim manoeuvres, shall die as a result of their own stratagems. The witnesses they produce to support their allegations will give evidence on oath against these very men and will bring about their destruction just as young vipers tear the womb of their mother and nourish themselves by sucking the very blood which was the source of life for them. The evil-doers will fight against their own wicked leader and, in this way, my enemies will do me good by destroying one another. Nor need I doubt the outcome of the contest between me and my enemies, because mobs which oppose a ruler spend all their brutal fury in their very first onslaught. Let them then wage war against me without any resistance from me. Let them attack, withdraw, and form a mistaken view of their force. I shall challenge them to a fight when they are exhausted and spent up, and shall overwhelm them with my superior power. Lawful power always shows its superiority when, having long been pushed back, it at last makes a stand and fights determinedly against the enemy."

Lines 1026--1031. This is what the King said. God Almighty nodded and gave His consent to the King's strategy. Peels of thunder shook the sky in token of God's approval. From that time onwards a new chapter in English history began. Many years of royal supremacy followed one another. Once more the divine power of King Charles was established and recognised, and willing nations humbly submitted to the authority of their lawful monarch.

—o—o—

Young vipers tear the womb of their mother and nourish themselves by sucking the very blood which was the source of life to them.

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13

Explanatory Notes on "Absalom and Achitophel"

(Lines 1—30)

ere priest-craft did begin—before priests established their hold upon the people by means of their cunning or artful devices. *Before polygamy was made a sin*—before the practice of having more than one wife was declared to be sinful; in times when a man could legitimately have more than one wife. *When man on many..... confin'd* (Lines 3-4)—When a man had the right to beget children by having sexual relations with many women; before a law was passed restraining a man from having sexual relations with more than one woman. The poet here regards monogamy as a curse. He recalls the happy times when there were no restrictions upon the sexual life of a man, and when it was not obligatory for a man to confine himself to one woman only. Dryden is, of course, speaking ironically while, at the same time, aiming at the defence of his royal patron (Charles II) who had several mistresses.

When Nature prompted—When a man followed his natural urges. *and no law deny'd.....and bride*—and there was no law forbidding a man to have indiscriminate sexual relations with wives and mistresses. *Israel's Monarch*—David, the King of Israel. Here, of course, the reference is to Charles II, the King of England. *after heaven's own heart*—in accordance with God's own wish. *wide as his command*—over an area as large as he held under his royal sway; over the length and breadth of his entire kingdom. *Scatter'd his Maker's image through the land* (Line 10)—scattered his children all over the country. *Maker's image*—The image of God who made man. (God made man in His own image).

Michal, of royal blood .....the tiller's care (Lines 11-12)—*Michal* was the daughter of Saul and the wife of King David. She was a childless woman. Here Michal refers to Catherine of Braganza who was the daughter of John IV of Portugal and who married King Charles II in 1662. She, like Michal, had no children. That is why the poet refers to her as "soil ungrateful to the tiller's care". The poet means that Catherine was a barren woman and was

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therefore like soil which remains unproductive in spite of the efforts of the farmer.

Not so the rest.....before (Lines 13-14)—Other women with whom Charles had sexual relations were not barren. They bore several children to God-like David. (Charles II's mistresses included Lucy Walters, who was the mother of the Duke of Monmouth; the Duchess of Cleveland, who was the mother of the Duke of Southampton, the Duke of Grafton, the Duke of Northumberland, etc.; the Duchess of Portsmouth, who was the mother of the Duke of Richmond; Nell Gwynn, who was the mother of the Duke of St. Albans; Mary Davis; Lady Shannon; and Catharine Peg.)

But since like slaves.....ascend (Lines 15-16)—But all these other women slept with King Charles like his slaves. They were not his lawfully wedded wives. None of their children was therefore legally entitled to be the heir to the throne.

Absalom—the Duke of Monmouth. *His conscious destiny*—he was conscious of his worth, which predestined him to greatness; he was aware that he was destined to become great. *Early in foreign fields he won renown*—(Line 23) Monmouth served in two campaigns as a volunteer in the French King Louise XIV's army against the Dutch in 1672 and 1673, and distinguished himself in them. In 1678, he was in command of the British troops in coalition with the Dutch against the French, and again acquitted himself with great distinction. *With Kings and States allied to Israel's crown*—with rulers who had alliances with the English King. The reference is to the rulers of Holland and France.

His motions all accompanied with grace (Line 29)—All his movements were graceful. This is a reference to the great personal beauty of the Duke of Monmouth. *And Paradise.....face*—looking at his face was like looking into paradise.

(Lines 31—44)

Indulgent David—loving Charles II; Charles II who was fond of the Duke of Monmouth. *His youthful..... ..renew'd*—The Duke of Monmouth reflected the past youthful appearance of Charles II. By looking at the Duke of Monmouth, Charles II was reminded of his own appearance as it was in the days of his youth.

Annabel—Monmouth was married to Anne Scott, Countess of Buccleuch. She was one of the most charming heiresses in Europe. The marriage took place in April, 1663. Annabel or Anne Scott was a patroness of Dryden, who dedicated his play *The Indian Emperor* to her.

Some excesses—some unlawful actions committed by Monmouth in the heat of the moment; some unlawful deeds which were a result of Monmouth's youthful energy. (These included the murder

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of a beadle in 1671 while Monmouth was engaged in the popular aristocratic pastime of attacking the watch). *Were constru'd..... o'er* (Line 38)—These unlawful deeds were attributed to his immaturity and were interpreted as having a cleansing effect by affording an outlet to his surplus energy.

Amnon's murder (Line 39)—This probably refers to the attack on Sir John Coventry in 1670 by Monmouth's men in revenge for a sarcastic remark by Coventry about the King's mistresses. Coventry was attacked on his way home from a tavern. (According to the biblical account, Amnon was Absalom's brother and he violated his sister, Tamar. He was killed by Absalom's servants when he was màking merry with wine).

By a specious name.....fame—This murder was given a plausible name. It was not described as murder but as fair revenge for Sir John Coventry's misconduct in speaking ill of the King.

Sion—London. *Sincerely blest*—Wholly happy; purely or truly happy. *Proves the best*—tests the best; subjects the best human beings to a test.

(Lines 45—60)

The Jews—the English people. *Murmuring race*—people who keep grumbling. *As ever tried the extent and stretch of grace* (Line 46)—God had to stretch his grace to its maximum in order to please these people; these people enjoyed the maximum benefit that God was capable of conferring on them. *God's pampered people*—people to whom God had been over-indulgent. *debauched with ease*—easily corrupted. *That God-smiths.....devise* (Line 50)—that the makers of divine images could make or that priests could think of. (This is a satirical reference to priests and others who exploit the people in the name of various deities).

These Adam-wits—these people who resembled Adam both in his original freedom and in resenting the slight restriction placed on him. These people enjoyed a lot of freedom as Adam did in the Garden of Eden. But, like Adam, they began to feel impatient of minor restraints on their freedom. (Adam was free to eat any fruit in the Garden of Eden, except the fruit of one particular tree, namely, the tree of knowledge. But Adam could not resist the temptation of tasting the forbidden fruit and thus incurring God's displeasure). These English Protestants now began to imagine that they were not completely free.

And when no rule.....proclaimed him King (Lines 53-56)—They did realise that there was no other nation in the present or in the past that was less subject to restraints and restrictions than themselves. In other words, they could see that they enjoyed greater liberty than any other nation. There were fewer curbs on them

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than on any other people. But, instead of feeling satisfied, they began to envy the unlimited freedom which was enjoyed by savages living in woods and in caves. (Savages living in a state of nature enjoy the completest freedom). The English Protestants developed a wild desire to acquire the unlimited freedom that belonged to savages. All people, except savages, seemed to be slaves to them. *They who, when .....him King* (Lines 57-60)—The English Protestants had, on the death of Cromwell, denied the office of the Lord Protector of England to his son, Richard Cromwell, and they had done so without using any force or violence. These people had, again, brought Charles, who had been living in the Netherlands in exile, back to England and proclaimed him King of England by general agreement and with great enthusiasm. (**Saul** –Oliver Cromwell. **Ishbosheth**—Richard Cromwell, son of Oliver Cromwell. On the death of his father, Richard Cromwell succeeded to the Protectorship, but he was forced to resign when he dissolved parliament in April, 1659. Richard Cromwell was a meek, temperate, and quiet man, and had not a spirit fit to succeed his father, or to manage such a perplexed government. (According to the biblical account, Ishbosheth was murdered after Saul's death). **Hebron**–the Netherlands. (Or, Hebron may refer to Scotland where Charles was crowned on January 1, 1651).

banished David—Charles who was living in exile in the Netherlands when he received the invitation to return, as King, to England.

(Lines 61—74)

humour—fancy; caprice. *An idol monarch*— a King who was more or less like a statue and whom they had been obeying. *Or melt him to that golden calf, a state* (Line 66)—They thought that they could remove the divinely appointed monarch and establish an idolatrous substitute in the form of a republican state, just as the golden calf, according to the biblical account, was substituted for the true God. The reference here is to the Old Testament story of how the followers of Moses were tricked by Aaron into melting all their gold ornaments and fashioning a golden calf which they wroshipped instead of God. The English people, too, thought of setting up a republican government by deposing the true King. *But these were random bolts*—But such thoughts were random shots and random attacks on the King. *factious crowd*—people who were supporting a political party. *free from stain* (Line 60)—free from any guilty designs.

And, looking backward .....civil wars (Lines 71-74)–The sober part of the English populace were free from any guilty designs and well understood the blessings of a peaceful reign. These people, looking back at the past, were reminded of the ugly and disgusting scars of the wounds that had been suffered by their country during the civil war. They cursed the civil war for the damage it had done to the nation. They were wisely filled with a fear lest those sad

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events should be repeated. In other words, the sober part of the population were quite contented with the prevailing state of things. They did not feel restless for a change. (*seams*—scars. *dishonest to the sight*—ugly or unpleasant to the sight. Dryden often uses the word "dishonest" in this sense).

(Lines 75—84)

thus qualified—having these qualities; being in this state of mind; having this disposition. *Inclined the balance to the better side*—influenced the situation in favour of King Charles. *providently*—with foresight; thriftily. *pimps*—panders; provides. *good old cause*—the cause of the republican commonwealth. *But when to sin..... a plot requires* (Lines 79—82)—Sometimes human nature is prejudiced and inclines towards sin or wickedness. On such occasions, the devil who is always on the look-out for opportunities, readily offers his help and employs various methods to promote evil designs. In this particular case, some people revived the cause of the republican commonwealth. What was needed next was a plot for the overthrow of the King.

(Lines 85—97)

Jerusalem—London. *Jebusites*—Roman Catholics. *And theirs the native right*—This line is incomplete. It imitates the Virgilian half-line. *the chosen people*—the Protestants (who thought themselves to be the favourites of God).

Note. Lines 90—97 are allusions to the numerous statutes which had, since the accession of Elizabeth, been promulgated for the suppression of Popery, and more particularly to the severe statutes which had been passed and enforced since the accession of Charles II.

And every loss the men of Jebus bore.....the more (Lines 90-91)—Various measures were enforced to ruin the Roman Catholics. The more the injustices that were heaped upon them, the more they were thought to be the enemies of God. The more the injury that was done to them, the more they were discredited as being irreligious and impious. (An example of the injustices done to them is given in line 95: "Their taxes doubled as they lost their land."). *And, what was harder yet to flesh and blood* (Line 96)—And what was even more difficult for human nature to bear. *Their gods disgraced, and burnt like common wood* (Line 97)—This is an allusion to the wholesale destruction of images and relics at the Reformation. as also to what regularly occurred on every anniversary of the 5th of November.

(Lines 98—113)

This set.....of beaten gold (Lines 98-103)—The Roman Catholic priests were greatly angered and incensed by this kind of treatment meted out to their deities. In one respect priests of all religions

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are alike. No matter what the origin or the line of descent of the deity they worship, they will go to any length to protect that deity against enemy attacks. The deity may have descended from stock, stone, or some other humble ancestry, but its followers and worshippers will defend it with the same enthusiasm and determination with which they would have defended it if it had descended from beaten gold. The poet is here ridiculing the fanatical worship of deities by priests of all religions. There are, of course, mercenary motives behind this worship.

The Jewish Rabbins (Line 104)—the Protestant clergymen. *In this conclude them honest men and wise*—The Protestant clergymen, although hostile to the Roman Catholic faith, approved of the attitude of the Catholic priests in this respect and declared them to be honest and wise. *To espouse his cause by whom they eat and drink* (Line 107)—to support the cause of the deity which was a source of livelihood to them. (This is another satirical fling).

From hence began.....unchewed and crude (Lines 108-113)—From this situation emerged that plot, namely the Popish Plot, which proved to be a curse to the English nation. This plot was bad in itself, but it was represented as being worse than it actually was. It was given wide publicity by the Protestants, and it was denounced in the strongest possible language by those who disbelieved it. Certain persons testified on oath that a plot had been hatched against the King, but certain other persons denied it with dying oaths. Among those who affirmed it on oath were Titus Oates and Bedloe, while those who denied it included Coleman, Grove, and Pickering. The Popish Plot was an imaginary plot hatched by the Roman Catholics against the life of the King. It was Titus Oates who devised or manufactured the plot. As a result of the false evidence tendered by him and others, many innocent persons were sentenced to death). *Not weighed.....and crude* (Lines 111-113)—The common people did not try to probe or examine or sift the evidence which had been supplied to support the allegations that the plot existed. They merely accepted it as true and received the account given of it without questioning it and without trying to exercise their judgment in the matter.

(Lines 114—129)

Some truth there was—That there was some slight foundation for Titus Oates's assertions cannot be doubted. *dashed*—mixed or adulterated. *brewed*—mixed. *but dashed and brewed with lies*—There was certainly some truth in the allegations, but this truth was adulterated and mixed with lies. *Succeeding times.....believing all* (Lines 116-117)—The generations that followed were of the opinion that it was equally foolish either to reject the Popish Plot as being totally false or to accept it as being wholly true. *Egyptian*—French. (Since the marriage of Charles I with Henrietta Maria, France was always associated with Roman Catholicism). *Jebusites*—

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Roman Catholics. *For ten to one former days was odds* (Line 123)—Their population being only one-tenth of the number of Protestants, they could not afford to fight against their enemies. *the sacrificer's trade*—the profession of one who offers sacrifices to gods. (The irony of this phrase is to be noted). *And raked for*—and searched for. *stews*—brothels; houses of ill-fame. *Hebrew priests*—Protestant clergymen. *Because the fleece accompanies the flock* (Line 129)—because if the sheep are lost the fleece which could have been obtained from them is also lost. In other words, if priests lose their followers, they lose money which they would have made from those followers. The word "flock" is often used for a priest's followers or for the congregation in a church, and the priest is often referred to as a shepherd.

The Egyptian rites.....accompanies the flock (Lines 118-129)—The English Roman Catholics accepted the ceremonies and rituals observed by the Roman Catholics of France, because people's respect for a deity is determined by the extent to which the worship of that deity can be a source of profit to them. Deities, who served a double purpose by offering to the people the opportunity of religious worship and also an opportunity to earn their livelihood, had surely to be regarded as pleasant and acceptable. The Roman Cathlics could not use force in order to impose their deities upon all the people because their number was only one-tenth of the number of their enemies. Therefore they resorted to cheating. Cheating is the principal weapon of those who pretend to make sacrifices in the name of religion. They resorted to cheating because they found that, in dealing with the foolish multitude, persuasion would yield better results than force. Accordingly, the busy Roman Catholic preachers started mingling with the Protestants and searched the royal court as also the city brothels in order to look for persons who could be converted to their religion. The Protestant clergymen disliked this course of action on the part of Catholic preachers all the more, because it meant not only the conversion of people to the Roman Catholic faith but also a loss of income to the Protestant clergymen.

(Lines 130—149)

God's anointed—Charles who had been anointed and made the King by divine authority. *Some thought they God's anointed meant to slay by guns*—Some were of the opinion that the conspirators intended to shoot the King to death. The reference here is to the alleged plan of Pickering, Grove, and Ireland to assassinate the King in April, 1678. *Our author swears it not*—The author of this poem cannot swear that this view was correct. *but who can know... may go ?*—(Lines 132—33)—but even this author believes that the Roman Catholics, like the devil himself, are utterly unscrupulous and can go to any length in attaining their object. *for want of common senes* (Lines 134)—Had it not been for the folly or the

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recklessness of Oates and his companions, there is no doubt that the Whigs would have won a sweeping victory. In other words, it was the folly of Oates and others that was responsible for the failure of their plan.

Hostile humour (Line 138)— mood that proves harmful to the health of a man. *Several factions*—Several political groups. *Soem by their friends*—"Some" here refers to (*i*) the Earl of Huntingdon, (*ii*) the Duke of Buckingham, and (*iii*) the Earl of Shaftesbury. *Like fiends* (Line 145)—like the rebellious angels ousted from heaven.

For as, when raging fevers.....and threat the government (Lines 136-141)—The idea is here conveyed by means of a simile. The blood in the body of a healthy human being flows calmly. But when a human being is attacked by a high fever, the blood begins almost to boil and every disease, which previously lay dormant and suppressed, emerges to the surface and makes itself strongly felt by the patient. In the same way, several political groups emerged to the surface as a result of the excitement caused by the alleged Popish Plot and posed a threat to the government. (In Line 137 the calmly flowing blood is compared to a standing lake, while the agitation caused by a high fever is compared to a flood which brings about a tumult in the lake. The political groups which emerge at the time of excitement in a country are compared to the various diseases that come to the surface when a man is attacked by high fever).

Some by their friends.....could tie (Lines 142-149)—Here the poet gives us the various categories of persons who combined to oppose the government of Charles II. Some persons, who were thought by their friends to be wise, began to oppose the government because they themselves could not rise to high positions of official authority. More persons, who were wise in their own eyes, opposed the government for the same reason. (There is a fling here at people who are thought to be wise not by others but by themselves). Some of the opponents had previously occupied high positions at the court but had been dismissed from those positions. These persons were hardened in their attitude of hostility to the King, like those angels who had been ousted from heaven and who had become confirmed enemies of God. Some of them were persons who had once offended the King by their rebellious attitude but who had been pardoned by the King. The King's forgiveness now rebounded upon himself and proved disastrous to his interest. These opponents included individuals who were related to the King by blood and whom the King had raised to high public offices after having pardoned them for their offences. These individuals formed powerful groups, if it is possible to speak of ungrateful men as forming a group. (The idea is that persons who are ungrateful to their benefactor cannot form a united group even when individually they have turned against that benefactor. In other words, ingratitude and the capacity for united action cannot co-exist).

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(Lines 150—172)

Close designs (Line 152)—secret schemes. *Turbulent*—stormy; tempestuous. *impatient of disgrace*—intolerant of insult. *A fiery soul*—an energetic or violent spirit. *working out its way*—asserting itself ; seeking an outlet in action. *Fretted* (Line 157)—irritated and thus weakened ; troubled and thus undermined. *And o'er-informed the tenement of clay* (Line 158)—and proved too much of a burden for his weak body. *tenement of clay*—the frail human body. *but, for a calm unfit* (Line 161)—but unfit for times of peace. *Would steer too nigh.....wit* (Line 162)—If a ship is driven too close to the sandy coast, it will get stuck or "run aground" Shaftesbury's actions in times of peace are compared to driving a ship too near the coast. In other words, his intelligence was a cause of trouble in times of peace. He was incapable of any constructive work. *wit*—intelligence. *to boast his wit*—to make the proud claim that he was a man of intelligence.

Great wits.....bounds divide (Lines 163-64)—Great thinkers are surely not very different from madmen. The boundary line between a great thinker and a mad man is almost imperceptible. In other words, a great thinker or philosopher is very nearly mad. He can hardly be distinguished from a madman.

Unfeathered two legged thing—Plato humorously defined man as a two-footed animal without wings. Dryden means the same thing here. He describes Shaftesbury's son by using a contemptuous phrase. *While his soul did huddled notions try*—when his mind was occupied with ideas that were perplexing and confusing. *And born .....anarchy* (Line 172)—At the time of his birth, this son looked like a shapeless, ugly mass of flesh comparable to a state of disorder and lawlessness prevailing in a country. The child at birth looked absurd, ridiculous, and deformed as if Nature had departed from rule.

(Lines 173—197)

implacable—relentness; merciless. *To compass this*—to achieve this object. *the triple bond he broke*—The Triple Alliance between England, Sweden and Holland, arranged by Sir William Temple in 1667-68 was broken by the war declared agaist Holland in 1672. Shaftesbury had been one of the most active promoters of that war. *The pillars of the public safety shook*—The Triple Alliance, being a safeguard against war, was a pillar of public safety or peace. But this pillar was shaken by the violation of the Triple Alliance. *And fitted Israel for a foreign yoke* (Line 177)—By violating the Triple Alliance, Shaftesbury prepared the way for England's slavery to a foreign power. There is a reference here to the secret alliance of Charles II with Louis XIV of France in 1667 by the Treaty of Dover. It has, however, been proved that Shaftesbury had no hand in it.

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A patriot's all-atoning name (Line 179)—the title of a patriot which serves to excuse all crimes. All the crimes committed by a politician are forgotten if he can convince people that he is a patriot. *public zeal*—patriotic enthusiasm. *private crimes*—personal misdeeds. *Where none can sin against the people's will* (Line 183)—where a man's misdeeds are in complete harmony with the general atmosphere of villainy all around. *Where crowds can wink*—where people shut their eyes (to the misdeeds of others) ; where the masses pretend not to have noticed anything wrong. *Since in another's guilt they find their own*—because in the misdeeds of others they see the image of their own misdeeds. Where all are sinful, no one will call another a sinner. When the whole nation is corrupt, no particular individual will be singled out as an evil-doer.

Abbethdin (Line 188)—President of an ancient Jewish Court. The word is compounded of "ab"=father, and "beth-din"=house of judgment (or a court of law). An Abbethdin was known for his honesty and integrity.

With virtues only proper to the gown (Line 193)—With the qualities appropriate to the office of a judge ; with judicial ability only. *Cockle*—a weed that grows in corn-fields and hinders the growth of the crop ; therefore "wicked elements". *noble seed*—corn ; therefore "good qualities". *David for him.....song* (Lines 196-7)—David, all of whose Psalms are in honour of Heaven, would have composed a Psalm in Achitophel's honour, and so Heaven would have been deprived of one Psalm. (*Wanted* here means "lacked" or "been deprived of)". That is Charles II would have composed a song in praise of Shaftesbury. (Another interpretation is this : David (*i.e.* Charles II) would have addressed a song of praise to Shaftesbury instead of a lament to Heaven).

Note : The Old Testament of the Bible contains 150 Psalms (=songs in praise of God). Some of them were composed by King David of Israel.

Note : The lines (186-97) in which Shaftesbury has been praised as a judge were added to the second edition of the poem when Shaftesbury had been acquitted of the charge of treason by the grand jury.

(Lines 198-219)

fortune's ice (Line 199)—the slipperiness of luck; the uncertainty and instability of luck. *virtue's land*—the solidity and equilibrium offered by the path of virtue. The idea is that, if a man follows the path of virtue, he can reasonably be sure of stability, while a man, who is reckless in his ambition, will stake everything on his luck even though he knows that there is the possibility of luck not favouring him. *lazy happiness*—a state of happiness which offered no opportunity for action. (If a man is satisfied with what he has got, he will feel no desire to take any initiative in any

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direction). *Disdained the golden fruit to gather free* (Line 202) The Early of Shaftesbury looked with contempt at the prize that already belonged to him or that was already within his reach. He now wanted to start a new enterprise in order to fulfil his reckless ambition. *the crowd to shake the tree*—to gather as much fruit as would drop to the ground by his shaking the tree; to add to his political power as much as was possible, with the help of the common people. *Disdained the golden fruits*.....the tree (Lines 202-3)—These two lines show Achitophel (or Shaftesbury) to be another Satan. Too haughty to enjoy the *golden* blessings of Heaven given freely by a gracious God, Lucifer falls; then he attempts to seduce the *crowd* as Satan did. Achitophel thus becomes the antagonist of God, that is, the King. *manifest of crimes*—with his crimes, having been exposed; his crimes against the King having become known. *buckler* — shield; weapon of defence.

Held up the buckler.....*behind the laws* (Lines 206-207)—His crimes had become known. He tried to shield himself by taking up the cause of the freedom of the people who, according to him, had been deprived of their freedom by the arbitrariness of the King. Furthermore, he tried to take shelter behind the laws of the land. He sought the protection of the laws of the land, asserting that whatever he had done was lawful. (*skulked*—took shelter; hid himself).

Wished occasion of the plot—an opportunity which he had wished for and which offered itself in the shape of the alleged Popish Plot against the King. *but more he makes*—but more evidence was manufactured by him. *buzzing emissaries*—agents who went about whispering into the ears of common people. *arbitrary counsels*— decisions taken by the King in an arbitrary or unconstitutional manner. *And proves the King himself a Jebusite* (Line 213)—He spread all kinds of rumours to establish that the King was not only in league with Roman Catholics but that the King was himself a Roman Catholic at heart. *governed by the moon* — ruled or influenced by the planet moon which is inconstant because it keeps changing its phases. *the giddy Jews*—the inconstant or fickle-minded Protestants. *the*—the moon. *the prime*—the beginning of an era. (This word was originally applied to the appearance of the new moon, and then became associated with the "golden number", the number of any year in the lunar cycle of 19 years. This was the approximate interval between the Long Parliament and the Restoration, again between the Restoration and the Popish Plot). *Tread the same track when she the prime renews* (Line 217)—The fickle-minded Protestants were in the habit of changing their ideas even as the moon changes its phases. Just as the new moon goes on waxing or increasing in size, so the Protestants went on changing their ideas.

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And once in twenty years.....their lord (Lines 218-19)—Their historians have recorded the fact that it is a natural instinct with the Protestants to change their monarch every twenty years. The author is here making fun of the Protestants who, according to him, cannot remain satisfied with their monarch for any great length of time. This is an ironical attack on the Protestants of those times.

(Lines 220-229)

Achitophel still wants a chief—The Earl of Shaftesbury still needed somebody whom he could set up as the leader of the revolt agai'st the King. *and none.....war like Absalom*—The Earl of Shaftesbury felt that the Duke of Monmouth, who had distinguished himself on various battlefields, would be fit to play the role of the leader of the revolt. *Not that he wished his greatness to create*—It was not the intention of Shaftesbury that the Duke of Monmouth should attain supreme power or attain a position of greatness. (*For politicians neither love nor hate*)—because politicians look to their own interest only, using others as their tools. Politicians neither love nor hate anybody. They would make use of a man whenever it suits them to do so or discard a man when such a course serves their purpose. Politicans have no real feelings. (This is a bit of sharp satire on politicians).

But, for he knew.....on the crowd (Lines 224-25)—He chose the Duke of Monmouth for this role because, the Duke of Monmouth's claim to the throne not having been recognised, Monmouth would continue to depend on the comon people for their support. In other words, Shaftesbury tried to use Monmouth merely as a tool. He did not want that Monmouth should become too strong, and he knew that Monmouth could not become too strong as he would have to continue to depend on the support of the common people. Monmouth, in his state of uncertainty, would have to remain dependent on the good-will of the multitude. *ebbing out*—declining; diminishing. *The dregs of a democracy*—the worst of kind of democracy. *That kingly power.....a democracy* (Lines 226-27)—Shaftesbury thought that, on account of the conflict between Monmouth and Charles II, royal power would go on diminishing till all power came into the hands of the common people. Shaftesbury hoped that eventually the country might touch such a low level as to replace the monarchy by a republic (with himself as the dictator).

Him he attempts with studied arts to please—Shaftesbury tried to please Monmouth by employing all kinds of cunning and subtle devices. *studied arts*—deliberate methods and devices. The word "studied" means deliberate or pre-meditated. *And sheds his venom*—and gives an outlet to his hatred of the King. *venom*—poison; here the poison of hatred.

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Note. Lines 230-302 contain Shaftesbury's speech by which he tried to instigate Monmouth against the King. This is the first of the several speeches in the poem.

(Lines 230-249)

Note. A commentator writes : "The whole of this passage to line 272 is a noble illustration of Dryden's magnificent rhetoric, of that union of sweetness with strength, of massiveness with flexibility which distinguishes his rhythm, of the vigour, incisiveness, and power of his style. It is when reading passages like these that we can feel the propriety of what Pope and Gray have written about him.

(1) "Dryden taught to join
The varying verse, the full resounding line,
The long majestic march and energy divine."*

(2) "Behold where Dryden's less presumptuous car,
Wide over the fields of glory bear
Two coursers of ethereal race,
With necks in thunder clothed and long-resounding pace."†

Auspicious prince.....southern sky (Lines 230-31)—Shaftesbury addresses Monmouth as a fortunate prince and says that some highly favourable star was in the ascendant in the southern sky when he was born. *Their cloudy pillar.....the promised land* (Lines 233-35)—Shaftesbury flatters Monmouth by comparing him to Moses who was a great prophet. Moses led his followers through the wilderness, being guided towards his goal by God who, during the day, appeared as a pillar of cloud and, during the night, as a pillar of fire. When Moses and his followers came to the sea, Moses extended the rod which he held in his hand, and the sea divided itself offering a dry passage to them. Moses had promised to take his followers from Egypt where they were persecuted to a distant land where they could begin a new life. Hence "the promised land."

Whose dawning day.....old men's dream (Lines 236-39)—Shaftesbury says that Monmouth's day of birth had been anticipated by sacred prophets of every distant period of time in the past. These holy prophets had been prompted by a divine inspiration to prophesy Monmouth's birth. (The word "rage" is here uesd in the sense of divine inspiration). The people had always prayed for the birth of such a man, namely Monmouth. Astrologers had felt happy to speak of his birth. (*diviners*—astrologers; soothsayers). Monmouth was the visible embodiment of the visions seen by young men and the dreams seen by old men.

*Pope in his *Imitation of Horace*

†Gray in his *Progress of Poesy*

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Saviour (Line 240)—Monmouth is here addressed by Shaftesbury as one who will save the nation. (The word "Saviour" is generally used for Christ who was believed to have saved mankind). *the nation's vows confess*—the nation swears its support and allegiance to Monmouth. *unbespoken pomps*—processions which were not arranged beforehand. *unbespoken pomps thy steps proclaim*—wherever the Duke of Monmouth goes, groups of people gather spontaneously to greet him. "Pomps' is here used in the sense of processions. *And stammering babes.....thy name* (Line 243)—Infants who are just learning to speak are being taught to pronounce Monmouth's name. The idea is that Monmouth is so popular that people try to teach his name to their children who are just learning to speak. ("To lisp" means to speak in the indistinct and imperfect manner in which a child speaks when it is learning to pronounce words. When the child is learning to speak, it is first taught to speak familiar and commonly used words). *defraud the people of thy reign* (Line 245)—cheat the people of their hope that he will become their king. *ingloriously*—obscurely; without winning the laurels which he has the capacity to win. *Like one of virtue's fools that feeds on praise* (Line 247)—Like one of those fools who follow the path of virtue and who feel happy just because they are being praised. *Till thy fresh glories.....with our daily sight* (Lines 248-49)—Monmouth will pass his days in this manner till the new honours, which he has won and which make him so attractive now, lose their brightness and become stale by being seen daily.

(Lines 250-278)

Or gathered ripe, or rot upon the tree (Line 251)—He must pluck the fruit when it is ripe upon the tree. If he fails to do so, the fruit will rot there and drop to the ground. The idea is that Monmouth must seize the opportunity which has come his way and that, if he fails to do so now, it will be lost for ever.

But, if unseized.....as she flies (Lines 258-61)—If a man fails to catch hold of Fortune, she disappears like the wind and leaves him to repent of his folly in having missed it. Fortune is at this moment ready to offer a glorious prize to Monmouth. Monmouth should catch hold of Fortune by her fore-locks before she flees and disappears.

from whose loins you spring (Lines 262)—who begot you; whose offspring you are. *Gath*—Brussels. (Charles was living in Brussels when he was invited by the English people to come and accept the English crown. According to the Bible, King David took refuge from Saul in Gath). *heaven's anointing oil* (Line 265)—the oil with which a King is anointed when he is crowned. This ceremony is performed at the time of the coronation of a King.

Jordan's sand (Line 270)—Dover Beach. Charles had landed upon Dover Beach when he went to England from Brussels in

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response to an invitation from the English people to become their King. *covering the beach, and blackening all the strand* (Line 272) —When Charles landed on Dover Beach, the whole beach was covered and darkened by multitudes of people who had gathered there to greet him. *The prince of angels*—Lucifer, the archangel, who fell from divine grace and was expelled from heaven. *one poor plot*—one feeble plot, namely, the Popish Plot. *Our only blessing since his cursed return* (Line 276)—Shaftesbury refers to the Popish Plot as the only blessing of the English people since Charles's return to England from exile. The Popish Plot is regarded by him as the only ray of hope in the evil reign of Charles II. *Those heaps of people.....a puff of wind* (Lines 277-78)—Those multitudes of people who were bound together by their love of Charles have now been dispersed and scattered by the disruptive effect of one weak plot. Shaftesbury means to say that the people no longer stand behind Charles II and that it is easy now to dislodge him from the throne.

(Lines 280-302)

Naked of friends—deserted by friends; deprived of the support of friends. *and round beset with foes*—and surrounded or besieged by enemies. *Pharaoh*—Pharaoh was a title used for the Kings of Egypt. Here the word is used for the French King, Louis XIV. *doubtful succour*—help which may not be given and which is therefore uncertain. *incense the Jews*—enrage the English Protestants. *Proud Egypt*—the proud King of France. *dissembled friendship*—pretended friendship. *foment the war*—encourage the civil war.

If Pharaoh's doubtful succour.....make David weak (Lines 281-88)—If Charles II makes use of the help of the French King, Louis XIV (who may not after all extend his support to him), the English Protestants would feel even more enraged with Charles for getting help from a foreign power. In any case, the arrogant French King would offer only a feigned friendship to Charles. The French King would encourage the civil war in England but give no real support to Charles. Nor would the supporters of Charles combine with the French army to help the Roman Catholics of England. Or, if they do so, their power would soon collapse, and Charles's strength would greatly be diminished because of the help that would be given to him by an ally who is hated in England.

estrange their altered hearts (Line 290)—Their attitude towards Charles would undergo a change and Charles would find that he has alienated them or lost their goodwill. *that gaudy flower* (Line 297) —"Praise" is here compared to a showy flower which is merely beautiful to look at but which has no perfume or fragrance. In other words, praise is something meaningless or valueless.

And nobler is a limited command.....of Noah's Ark (Lines 299-302)—And even limited authority, if it is acquired with the support and affection of the people of his land, would be worth having. Such authority would be a nobler achievement than king-

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ship gained through succession to the throne by virtue of a legal claim derived from a long and ancient ancestry which goes as far back to the past as Noah's Ark mentioned in the Bible. (Shaftesbury is here trying every plausible argument to instigate Monmouth against Charles II. In these lines he tries to underestimate the value of a legal claim to the throne and speaks highly of the power which can be attained by revolting against the reigning monarch and removing him from the throne. What is the use of putting forward a legal claim based on an ancestry dating from the ancient, dead past ?) *mouldy rolls*—decayed records; records which have become worn-out by the passage of centuries. *Noah's ark*—The Bible tells us of how Noah built a boat for the rescue of a pair of each of the living species from the great flood which God sent to punish the people of the earth. The use of this phrase is intended to emphasize the ancientness of the royal ancestry.

(Lines 303-342)

What cannot praise.....heavenly fire (Lines 303-8)—These lines contain one of the several generalisations that occur in the course of this poem. Flattery has a soothing effect on a human being, while ambition blinds him to facts. No matter how powerful the mind of a man, flattery can produce a deep effect on him. The desire to wield power is as harmful to the mind as a weed is to the soil on which it grows. Yet this desire originated in heaven and has a divine source. This desire to wield power is something glorious in God. But when human beings become ambitious of wielding power, it means that they have too much of the divine element in them (because love of power is essentially a divine quality), and are therefore trying to exceed human limits.

The ambitious youth (Line 309)— the young Duke of Monmouth. *too covetous of fame*—excessively desirous of attaining fame. *Too full of angel's mettle in his frame* (Line 310)—having too much of the angel Lucifer's nature in his make-up. *(Angel's mettle* refers to the ambitious nature of Lucifer, the angel, who led a revolt against God in heaven). *unwarily*—unknowingly; unconsciously. *Debauched with praise*—corrupted or misled by flattery. *Half loath and half consenting to the ill*–half unwilling, and half agreeing to the evil counsel offered by Shaftesbury.

And heaven by wonders has espoused his cause (Line 320)—And God supported the cause of Charles II in wonderful ways. (This refers to England's invitation to Charles to return to England and accept the English crown which he did in 1660).

What millions has he.....to his wrath expose? (Lines 323-4) —Monmouth, speaking in defence of Charles II, says that the King has forgiven millions of his enemies who deserved to be punished by him. The King would have done no wrong if he had punished those enemies who had incurred his wrath by opposing him. But, instead of punishing them, he pardoned them.

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yoke a servile train—rule his slavish followers in a tyrannical or dictatorial manner. *dog-star* (Line 334)—the planet Sirius under the influence of which days become very hot. "Dog days" is an expression meaning the hottest days of the year. *The dog star heats their brains*—Excessive heat drives them mad.

Let haughty Pharaoh.....to this disease (Lines 331-34)—Let the French King, Louis XIV, damn his fertile land with his arbitrary reign, and let him exercise his tyranny over his slavish followers. Charles II is a mild, gentle, and forgiving monarch If the people of London are still displeased with Charles, it mean that their brains have been heated by the dog-star, Sirius, andthat they are therefore insane. (Monmouth here draws a contrat between the arrogant Louis XIV and the gentle Charles II, ad sees no reason why he should oppose the reign of Charles II. "Haughty Pharaoh" refers to the arrogant French King, as in lines 283 and 286. Nile is the name of a river in Egypt, and may here refer to he river Seine).

Run popularly mad (Line 336)—try like a mad man to gain the applause of the people, or act madly in the manner of the common people. *Oppressed the Jews and raised the Jebusites*—trampled upon the rights of the Protestants and shown undue favours to the Roman Catholics. *Nature's holy bands*—the sacred natural ties which bind a son to his father and *vice versa*. *Would curb my spirits and restrain my hands*—Monmouth says that, even if Charles II were an unjust King, his natural filial piety would act as a restraint on his mind and on his hands and would prevent him from rebelling against the King or using violence against him.

(Lines 343—372)

and outruns desire (Line 344)—fulfils my desires before they are felt by me. *All but his kingly diadem he gives* (Line 346)—He gives me everything except only his crown; he overwhelms me with his favours and the only favour that he is not in a position to do to me is to appoint me the heir to the throne. *Is justly destined for a worthier head* (Line 348)—The crown is rightly meant to be worn by a person who is abler than myself or who has a better claim to it, namely the Duke of York. *the number of the blessed*—the number of persons who have already died and gone to heaven. *His lawful issue .....shall end* (Line 351-52)—When Charles dies, his legitimate son will ascend to the throne. In case he does not have any lawful issue, his brother, who is the legitimate heir in the collateral line, will do so. *Collateral*—of common descent but by different line. (The children of two brothers for instance, are collaterals) Here, of course, the word is used for James, Duke of York, the son of the same father as Charles II.

though oppressed with vulgar spite—though troubled or persecuted by the ill-will of the vulgar or common people. *dauntless*—

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unafraid; firm. *secure of native right*—sure of his legal claim to the throne.

Why should I then.....royalty (Line 361-62)—Having described the excellent qualities of the legal heir to the throne, the Duke of Monmouth says that, under the circumstances, he has no reason to lament the will of heaven. Heaven has given him no legal status to claim the throne. There is no need for him, therefore, to feel any regret over the situation. (*repine*—to feel sad).

Yet O that fate.....a God-like sin (Lines 363-72)—Having said that he has no reason to feel sad over the situation, the Duke of Monmouth yet expresses his keen dissatisfaction at the state of affairs. It is a pity that he was born an illegitimate son of the King. If fate had been favourable to him, he would have born a legitimate son. If he was to be born a bastard, he should have been given a mean or vulgar mind which would have been more in keeping with his illegitimate status. Fate did him a great injustice by condemning him to an illegitimate birth and then endowing him with a large or generous heart. What he means to say is that his large heart and his illegitimate birth do not go well together. The Duke of Monmouth finds that his bold spirit is rising and is unable to tolerate the fact that King Charles does not own or recognize him. It is to be deplored that he, who is the image of his mother, should be so treated by his father. He asks why his illegitimate birth should diminish his importance. His soul refuses to acknowledge any relationship with the common earthly people. His soul was made to rule an empire and it tells him in a whisper that, even if the desire to attain greatness is a sin, this sin has a divine quality. (The reference here obviously is to the sin of Lucifer, the archangel, in claiming equality with God).

(Lines 373—410)

Staggering—wavering; shaking in his purpose. *hell's dire agent* (Line 373)—The Earl of Shaftesbury who is here contemptuously described as the wicked agent of the devil (because he is instigating the Duke of Monmouth to revolt against his father, the King). *Him, staggering, etc.* —parody of the epic manner. *fainting virtue* —Monmouth's loyalty which was collapsing. *He pours fresh forces in* (Line 374)—The Earl of Shaftesbury employs additional arguments in order to reinforce the effect which he has already produced. *prodigious gifts*—enormous natural abilities (The Earl of Shaftesbury continues to tickle the vanity of Monmouth by flattery). *What wonders are reserved to bless your reign* ? (Line 378)—What wonderful benefits will be conferred by the Duke of Monmouth upon the people when he becomes the King! *Such virtue.....a throne* (Line 380)—Such extraordinary ability is given to a man only if fate wants him to govern a nation. (This is another flattering remark). *contemn*—condemn; disapprove. *But manly force becomes the diadem*

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(Line 382)—but a strong assertiveness, rather than gentleness, better suits a King. A King should not be too mild. *For lavish grants .....proclaim* (Lines 385-6)—If a King is too liberal towards his people, he will be thought to be a submissive man. Such liberality is regarded as a sign of goodness but not of intelligence. A King who is too liberal with his favours gets the reputation of being good rather than intelligent.

Let him give on till he can give no more (Line 389)—Let the King go on being liberal or generous till he runs out of money and is no longer in a position to continue being generous. *thrifty*—frugal; not liberal. *Sanhedrin*—parliament. *The thrifty.....poor*—Parliament, which is not so liberal, will see to it that the King no longer has the means or the resources to show generosity. *Shekel*—the name of an ancient Jewish coin. *a limb of his prerogative*—a part of his royal authority. *And every Shekel.....prerogative* (Lines 391-92)—And every penny that he receives by the authority of parliament will mean a loss of some part of his royal power. With every grant voted to him by parliament, he will become weaker and weaker as a King. His dependence on parliament for money will automatically mean the curtailment of his royal authority.

to ply him with new plots shall be my care (Line 393)—Shaftesbury says that it will be his responsibility to bother and annoy the King with fresh conspiracies. Shaftesbury means that he will keep the King on tenter-hooks. *The remains of kingship* (Line 396)—whatever of royal authority is left with him. (The idea is that he will barter away the remains of his royal authority for money). *His faithful friends.....pensioners* (Line 398)—The prose form of these two lines is as follows : "Our jealousies and fears call his faithful friends Jebusites and Pharaoh's pensioners." The meaning is: "On account of our jealousies and fears of the King, we describe his loyal supporters as Roman Catholics and as being in the pay of the French King, Louis XIV." *Jebusites*—Roman Catholics. *Pharaoh*—here used for the French King. *when our fury from his aid has torn*—when, in our rage, we snap the bonds between him and his helpers. *naked*—bereft of supporters; friendless. *obnoxious state*—hateful in the eyes of the people. *Turned all his virtues to his overthrow* (Line 403)—His very virtues have been depicted as faults so that they may serve to bring about his downfall. *And gained our elders to pronounce a foe* (Line 404)—The members of parliament have been persuaded to declare him an enemy of the people.

His right.....into law (Lines 405-8)—The King will badly need gold or money. He will willingly first pawn and then sell his royal authority for money. In other words, he will agree to part with all his royal authority for cash. In course of time, the ever-needy Charles will be forced to accept Monmouth's doubtful claim to the throne as lawful and valid. *for Kings are made for them* (Line 410)—because Kings are meant to serve the interests of the

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people, and the people have the right to remove a King if he does not serve them to their satisfaction.

(Lines 411-460)

when resumed (Line 412)—when the King exercises authority as a personal right and not as a trust. *Succession, for the general good .....a nation grieve* (Lines 413-16)—The law of succession is designed to ensure the interest of the people in general. A nation is not bound to abide by that law if it endangers the general welfare. If it becomes necessary in the interest of the people to alter the law of succession, there should be no objection to such a step being taken. It is better that one man (the legal heir to the throne) should be deprived of his claim than that the whole nation should suffer the evil consequences of his ascending the throne.

The Jews—the English Protestants. *Saul*—here used for Cromwell. *and God durst depose*—and they dared to remove God (or the King) from the throne. *Urge now your piety.....future fame* (Lines 419-20)—The Duke of Monmouth should claim the throne on the basis of his being Charles's son and on the basis of his filial devotion to Charles. *and fear of future fame*—and the King's fear of the adverse opinion that people in the future might form of him. *The public good.....answers all* (Lines 422-23)—The good of the people is a demand to which even heaven submitted when Charles I was removed from the throne to make way for Cromwell. The good of the people cannot be disputed by anyone, because it has a universal validity.

Nor let his love.....in their posterity (Lines 423-6)– Nor should the Duke of Monmouth allow his generous mind to be influenced by Charles's love for him. Charles's love for Monmouth is a kind of love which every father feels for his son. But this love is merely a trick or device by which Nature brings about the breeding of children and the perpetuation of the human race. All men have a selfish motive in begetting children. Men want to perpetuate themselves and their memory. They beget children so that their children may keep their names alive. Thus the love of children is a kind of self-love in a man. ("Fond" in Line 425 is used in the sense of "foolish").

Or let his kindness.....or let him, etc. (Lines 427-28)—"Or .....or" here should be read as "either.....or". Either Charles should prove his love for Monmouth by results or he should admit that his love is a meaningless pose. Either the King should raise Monmouth to the position of the heir to the throne, or let him no longer pretend that he loves Monmouth.

the shepherd—the ruler. *So fair a flock as Israel*—such excellent people as the English people. *to alienate the crown* (Line 434)—to deprive Monmouth of the crown. *The name of godly he may bluhs*

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to bear—Charles may feel ashamed if he is described as a godly type of man. *'Tis after God's own heart to cheat his heir* (Line 436)—It is God's own desire that Charles should deprive his legal heir (James, Duke of York) of the right to the throne. In other words, it is God's will that Monmouth, not York, should become the next King. *legacy of barren land* (Line 438)—ownership of a piece of barren land; the landed property which the King settled upon Monmouth. *on which he thrums his lays* (Line 439)—on which he plays the tunes of his songs. *Hebrew ballad*—English poem. *And like a lion.....his hunter tears* (Lines 447-54)—The idea is here expressed by means of a simile. The Duke of York is compared to a lion who sleeps or who pretends to be sleeping but who is actually waiting for a victim. This lion will allow his bold enemies to come near. He will refrain from roaring and from spreading his paws till at last he finds that the moment has come for him to give vent to his rage and to make a sudden leap from the ground in order to pounce upon the enemy. This lion does not take any notice of the ordinary and low creatures who lie prostrate before him on account of fear, but he attacks, in a state of royal fury, the enemies who chased him and who wanted to hunt him down. The lion is thus able to destroy his enemies. The Duke of York will follow a similar technique.

tame expedients (Line 455)—feeble devices. *Resolve on death .....you draw* (Line 456)—Let Monmouth either make up his mind to perish or to win a victory by the sword which he must draw and use because his very life is threatened.

The warm people—The people who are enthusiastic in their support of Monmouth. *For then rebellion may be thought a crime* (Lines 460)—If he gives people the time to think or to weigh the issues, his revolt against the King may be regarded as an act of treason. *But try your title when your father lives*—Let Monmouth try to establish his right to the throne while his father, King Charles II, is still alive. *your arms*—his armed action. *a fair pretence*—a seeming justification. *Proclaim to take them in the King's defence*—(Line 464)—Let him declare that he is acting in order to protect the King's life which is exposed to danger from plots.

Perhaps his fear his kindness may control (Line 468)—It is possible that the King's love for Monmouth may prove to be stronger than his fear of his brother James. *for plighted vows too late to be undone*—Although he may now be desirous of making Monmouth the heir to the throne, he finds it too late to do so because he has already made a commitment in favour of his brother James.

If so, by force.....possess the Laws (Lines 471-76)—Perhaps the King inwardly wishes that Monmouth should succeed him as the King. But the King cannot now go back upon the pledge that he has taken in favour of his brother James. In this situation the

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King would like that Monmouth should use force against him and should be successful in establishing his right to the throne. Lustful women inwardly crave for the satisfaction of their lust but cannot outwardly say so. Such women would be inwardly pleased if force were used against them. Outwardly these women would struggle and resist the force that is being used, but inwardly they would welcome this use of force. In the same manner, the King would be happy if Monmouth uses force against him in order to establish his right to the throne. Let Monmouth take the King into custody and then proclaim himself to be the heir to the throne. Those who hold a King in their custody can twist the laws to suit their own purpose.

Unblamed of life ambition set aside (Line 479)—free from faults, leaving aside ambition. His only fault, if fault it be, was his ambition to succeed to the throne. *Bu charming greatness..... than accuse* (Lines 485-6)—But few people can resist the temptation to attain a position of greatness, if that position is within their reach. The high status of a King has a charm which cannot be resisted. We would therefore be more justified in deploring Monmouth's ambition than in accusing him of a crime. *blandishments* (Line 488)—flattery; gestures of goodwill; moves designed to woo (the people). *And popularly prosecute the plot* (Line 490)—and to pursue the plot against the King with popular support. *To further this*—to promote this. *mal-contents of all the Israelites*—the disgruntled elements of the English population. *to serve the same design*—to help in the fulfilment of the same objective. *Mistaken men* — deluded men; deceived men. *Not wicked, but seduced by impious arts* (Line 498)—persons of this category were not realy evil-minded, but they were deceived and misled by the cunning (of Shaftesbury and his agents.) *By these.....the government* (Lines 499 500)—These persons pressed their claims of property to an excessive degree, and tha result of the pressure that they exerted on the government was that the government suffered a severe setback. The government almost collapsed under the strain exerted on it by the propertied class.

for interest (Line 501) 1—for self-interest. *to embroil the state* —to involve the government in difficulties. *To sell their duty at a dearer rate*—to lend money to the government at a higher rate of interest. *And make their Jewish markets of the throne* (Line 503)—and convert the throne inth a source of financial gain for themselves. *pretending public good, to serve their own* (Line 504)—They pretended that they had lent money to the government in the interest of the nation, but their actual motive was to make money at the cost of the nation. (In Lines 501-4, the poet refers to people who wanted to make money by involving the country in a civil war. These were the false patriots who, in lending money to the King, pretended to serve the national interest, but whose real motive was

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to charge a higher rate of interest on the loans they gave than they could charge in normal times).

(Lines 505-542)

These were fo laying honest David by (Line 507)—These persons wanted to remove the honest King, Charles II, from the throne. *on prin.iples of pure good husbandry*—for purely economic reasons (because they thought that the King cost too much and did little good). *haranguers*—orators. *haranguers of the throng*—orators who specialised in addressing mobs of people. *to get preferment by the tongue* (Line 510)—to get promotion by using their tongue; to raise their status by their talkativeness and rhetoric. *Not only hating David, but the King*—They hated not only Charles II, but kingship itself. *Solymean rout*—London mob. (Solyma was another name of Jerusalem). *well-versed of old in Godly faction* (Line 513)—having long experience of religious strife. *and in treason bold*—and bold in their treachery towards the King. *cowering and quaking*—shrinking and shuddering. *at a conqueror's sword*—at the violence which a conqueror like Cromwell threatened them with. *But lofty to a lawful prince restored* (Line 516)—but they were arrogant towards Charles II who had lawfully been made the King when monarchy was restored to England (in 1660). *Ethnic*—Gentile. The Jebusites were Gentiles. The Ethnic Plot refers to the Popish Plot. *to be outdone* (Line 518)—to be excelled; to be surpassed. *Levites*—priests; here, the dissenting clergy, deprived of their offices by the Act of Uniformity (1662). (The Levities were the priestly tribe). *Hot Levites headed these*—these people were headed, or led, by hot-tempered priests. *who, pulled before from the Ark*—who had been deprived of their offices. *the Ark*—the Ark of the Covenant; religious authority in the state. *which in the Judges' day they bore* (Line 520)—(offices) which they had held during the days of the Commonwealth. (*the Judges' days*, refers to the period of 300 years when Israel was ruled by the Judges or the twelve national leaders). *Resumed their cant* (Line 521)—re-asserted their vulgar ideas. *theocracy* (Line 532)—the Commonwealth which was ruled by Cromwell in God's name.

Note. The Presbyterian clergymen had been displaced, and deprived of their offices, by the act of Uniformity in 1662. These clergymen now made a fanatical demand for the re-establishment of the Commonwealth.

Sanhedrin—parliament. *And justified their spoils by inspiration*) (Line 524)—and exploited the people by pretending that their actions were inspired directly by God. *their spoils*—their looting and robbing the people. *Aaron's race*—descendants of Aaron; priests. (Aaron was the first high priest. He was succeeded by his sons. (It was Aaron who made the Golden Calf, which Dryden uses in line 66 to symbolise a republic). *If once dominion they could*

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found in grace (Line 526)—if spiritual grace qualified one for political rule. If spiritual grace were the test of political power, then naturally clergymen would claim the right to rule the people. *These led the pack*—These persons were the leaders of the rebels. *though not of surest scent*—though their guidance was not very reliable. (In hunting, a pack of hounds are used to lead the hunters. The hounds are able to spot the prey, a fox, etc. by their keen powers of smell). *deepest mouthed against the government* (Line 528)—making much noise in their opposition to the government.

a numerous host—a multitude of countless persons. *dreaming saints*—visionary priests. *enthusiastic breed*—belonging to the fanatical type. *And, by the same.....did hate* (Lines 537-58)—And, because of the same blind instinct for which fate was responsible, they hated the Roman Catholics as well as the Devil. *even in their own despite* — in spite of themselves. *Such were the tools*—such were the agents that Shaftesbury made use of. *but a whole Hydra .....too long to score*—but there were numerous others, too many to be counted. (Hydra in ancient mythology was a monster with numerous heads. When any one of the heads of this monster was cut off, another grew in its place).

(Lines 543-568)

Zimri—Duke of Buckingham (1627-87). He had satirised Dryden in *The Rehearsal*. He was the Chief Minister in the Cabal and accompanied Shaftesbury to the prison. (Dryden was very proud of the manner in which he had sketched the characrter of Zimri in this poem. In fact, he thought that this character-sketch was "worth the whole poem"). *mankind's epitome*—a summing-up of all mankind. (The idea is that in his character were represented all kinds of human beings. He had no particular character by which he could be identified. He represented a mixture of innumerable temperaments and characters). *by starts*—by fits and starts; not continuously. *and nothing long*—and he did not stick to any particular role for a long time. *one revolving moon*—one month. *chemist*—alchemist. *fiddler*—one who plays on a fiddle. *buffoon*—joker; clown. *freaks that died in thinking*—tricks that were lost in the very process of being conceived. *but desert* (Line 560)—except merit. *Beggared by fools*—robbed and impoverished by foolish fellows. *whom still he found too late*—whose real nature he discovered when it was too late. *He laughed himself from court*—This is a reference to Buckingham's foolish plot against the King in 1667, as a result of which he was thrown into prison where he remained till the King, moved by the mingled threats and entreaties of the Duchess of Cleveland, set him free. *He left not faction, but of that was left* (Line 568)—It was not he who left the party, but it was the party that abandoned him.

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(Lines 569-582)

Of Lords below the dignity of verse (Line 570)—of people holding a high rank but not worthy of mention by a poet; lords who are below the dignity of poetry to mention. *Commonwealth's-men* —supporters of the cause of the Commonwealth. *kind husbands* —husbands who were so kind-hearted that they did not mind the King's making love to their wives. *in the name of dullness*—in order to avoid the feeling of boredom. *well-hung*—fluent of speech; (also, sexually potent). *Balaam*—the Earl of Huntingdon (1650-1701). He presented the first petition demanding the recall of parliament (December, 1679), and headed the signatories in the indictment of James as a Papist (June, 1680). Balaam, according to the Bible, was summoned by Balak, the Moabite, to curse the Israelites because of the efficacy of his cursing and blessing. He was said to have encouraged fornication (that is, illicit sexual relations). He deserted Balak when confronted by the angel of the Lord. It is for this reason that his name has been given to the Earl of Huntingdon who broke with Shaftesbury and was reconciled with the King in October, 1681. *cold Caleb*—Lord Grey of Wark, who is regarded as cold because he allowed Monmouth to have a love-affair with his wife, and later disgraced himself by cowardice at Sedgmoor. *And therefore.....free* (Lines 573-4)—Dryden says that, in order to avoid dullness, he would not like to dwell upon such names as the Earl of Huntingdon and Lord Grey of Wark. Let these persons be forgotten. *canting*—using religious phraseology or jargon. *Nadab*—Lord Howard of Escrick (1626-94). *And canting Nadab let oblivion damn*—And let Lord Howard of Escrick, who was in the habit of using religious jargon as a dissenting preacher, be doomed to forgetfulness. Dryden would not like to immortalise such people by describing them in his poem. *Who made new porridge for the paschal lamb* (Line 576)—The informer, Fitzharris, who had written a shameful libel against the Court, was convicted of high treason, and in a vain effort to save his life asserted that Lord Howard had instigated him to forge a document incriminating the Queen and the Duke of York. Howard was accordingly sent to prison where he published a declaration asserting his innocence, and this he confirmed by taking the sacrament in lamb's wool, that is, ale poured on roasted apples and sugar. (In the Bible Nadab "offered strange fire before the Lord". He and his brother took their censers, put fire therein, put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them and they died before the Lord).

The word "paschal" refers to the Jewish festival commemorating the liberation of Israelites from the Egyptian bondage. "Paschal lamb" is an expressian used figuratively for Christ. "Sacrament" is a ceremony at which a solemn oath is taken. The idea is that Howard took a solemn oath to prove his innocence.

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bull-faced Jonas—Sir William Jonas whose face resembled that of a bull. As Attorney-General, he had conducted the prosecutions against those engaged in the Popish Plot ; but some time after he resigned office and joined the Opposition. *who could statutes draw*—He drew up the Habeas Corpus Act and the Exclusion Bill.

(Lines 583-629)

heaven's anointed—Charles II, who was the King by divine authority. *Shimei*—Slingsby Bethel. He was the son of a staunch royalist, but he did not follow in his father's footsteps, being a notorious Republican. In 1680, he was chosen one of the Sheriffs of the City of London and, to qualify himself for his office, renounced the Covenant, received the Sacrament, but adhered to his factious principles. Eccentric and mean, he kept no table, but lived at a chop-house, giving no entertainment during the whole of his tenure of office. He turned from the ordinary way of a Sheriff's living into the extremes of sordidness. His stinginess passed into a proverb. *and never broke the Sabbath but for gain* (Line 588)—(ironical) ; Slingsby Bethel never violated the holiness of the Sabbath (the day of rest), unless he could make money by doing so. *Thus, heaping wealth.....and pray* (Lines 591-2)—He made money in the quickest possible manner that was known to the English people, namely by cheating others but maintaining a holy exterior. *his pious hate* (Line 593)—his hatred for the King, which was a sign of his piety; (ironical)· *rare* (Line 595)—wand; rod of authority. *sons of Belial* (Line 598)—rebels. The 'sons of Belial' is a phrase used to describe several rebels against David. Belial was the devil specially associated with licentiousness. *prodigal of pelf*—extravagant in spending money. *Yet loved his wicked neighbour as himself* (Line 600)—a satirical fling based upon the precept : "Love thy neighbour as thyself." Slingsby Bethel loved those fellows who were as wicked as he himself. *to declaim*—to speak in a rhetorical manner. *the monarch of Jerusalem*—the ruler of London; the English King, Charles II. *Would rather curse than break good company* (Line 605)—He would join them in cursing the King instead of dispersing them. "Good company" is ironical. *If any durst..... human laws* (Lines 606-9)—If anyone dared to accuse his party-men of treason, he would appoint a jury to try the accuser. The jury appointed by him consisted of the enemies of the King. Such a jury would naturally support the enemies of the King and would condemn to death the accuser who had brought any charges against Slingsby Bethel's friends. The accuser was thus released from the obligation to obey laws framed by human beings. By being sentenced to death such a person was liberated from all legal restraints. *For laws are only made.....to protect his foes* (Lines 610-11)—This is ironically said. *to persuade*—to urge; to convince. *a clog to trade*—an obstruction to trade. *no Rechabite.....more shunned the fumes of*

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wine (Line 617)—Slingsby Bethel abstained from wine even more scrupulously than the Rechabites. (The Rechabites were a tribe of people who observed total abstinence from wine: "Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye nor your sons for ever"). **Note.** Lines 618—629 continue the satirical description of Slingsby Bethel. In these lines, reference is made to his extreme miserliness. Slingsby Bethel honoured the laws given by Moses all the more because Moses had observed a fast for 40 days. Slingsby Bethel was so miserly that he fed his servants mainly on spiritual food and not on meat because meat, he thought, would have made them rebel against him. *Chaste were his cellars*—He kept no wine in his house. His cellars, where wine should have been stored, were absolutely "innocent" (that is, empty). *shrieval board*—the dinner-table of a Sheriff. *The grossness.....abhorred* (Line 619)—hated the vulgarity of a city feast; (the idea is that no rich dishes were served at his table). *Such frugal virtue.....accuse* (Line 622)—Only a malicious man would condemn a sheriff who exercised such econony at meals. *For forty days..... mount* (Line 629)—Moses observed a fast for 40 days on Mount Sinai: "And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water."

Lines 630—680 are a descriptive character-sketch of Titus Oates to whom the biblical name of Corah is given. *Well-breathed witness* —witness having strong lungs and therefore able to speak a lot. *Corah*—Titus Oates. He was the son of a weaver. Having been educated at Cambridge, he took orders and officiated as a curate in Kent and Sussex, but, being guilty of gross immorality, he was suspended. He then went over to the Church of Rome, and obtained admission into the Jesuits' College at St. Omer. Returning to England, he concocted the notorious lies about the alleged conspirators in the Popish Plot. For the supposed service he had thus done to the King, he was given a pension and was lodged in White-hall, and protected by guards. On the accession of James II, proceedings were taken against him, and an enormous fine imposed. Finally he was tried for perjury. He changed his religion several times in the course of his life. *thou shalt from oblivion pass*—you shall not pass into oblivion; you will not be allowed to be forgotten. *monumental brass*—a man who has acquired monumental proportions because of his brazenness; person whose importance is based upon his insolence and arrogance. *High as the serpent of thy metal made*—This is a reference to the serpent of brass which Moses erected in order to save his followers from snake-bite. *thy metal*—brass. *While nations stand secure beneath thy shade*—People having the protection of Titus Oates are as secure as the Israelites were when they stood under the serpent of brass erected by Moses. (This is, of course, said ironically). **Note.** Oates is compared to the brazen serpent erected by Moses which preserved his followers. Here is the relevant extract from the Bible. "And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.....And

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Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived." (*Numbers* XXI 6-9). Likewise Titus Oates promised to save the Protestants from the evil designs of Roman Catholics. (But what was divine grace in the case of Moses was villainy in the case of Titus Oates). *What though his birth..... in skies*—His low birth did not prevent him from attaining greatness. After all, comets which are seen shining in the sky were originally earthly vapours. If earthly vapours can take the shape of bright comets, a person of low birth, like Titus Oates, can also rise to greatness. *arch-attester*—chief witness (of the Popish Plot). *that one deed*—his action in giving false evidence as a witness of the Popish Plot. *ennobles all his blood*—exalts him to a high position. (This, too, is ironical). *Who ever asked.....did Stephen grace ?*—Stephen was the first Christian saint to die a martyr. Those who appeared as witnesses against him had been bribed to do so. Nobody went into the family background of those witnesses. Their evidence was accepted as true regardless of their family background. In the same way, Titus Oates's evidence was accepted as true regardless of the fact that he was a man of low birth. *ours was a Levite*—our witness, Titus Oates, was a priest. *a Levite*—one of the tribe of Levi. The Levites were close to God because they were entrusted with the service of the tabernacle. A "Levite" therefore means a "priest". (The biblical Levites, being exclusively assigned to the tabernacle, became a learned caste. Corah's world made him one of these gentlemen of God; only in a world so false, in times so perverted, could such a monster seem a noble man). *and as times went.....gentleman*—And such was the prevailing temper of the times, that priests were regarded as the highest class of people created by God Almighty. (This is, again, ironically said. The author is, in fact, making fun of the priests of the time. As has been pointed out, Titus Oates too was a priest).

Sure signs.....nor proud (Line 647)—His sunken eyes and his harsh voice were sure signs that he was neither ill-tempered nor proud. (This is ironical, because sunken eyes and a harsh voice are actually indicative of ill-temper and arrogance). *his saint-like grace .....Moses's face*—His ruddy complexion showed that he had the grace of a saint. His ruddy complexion reminded the beholders of the brightness which shone on the face of Moses after he had met God. (Vermilion means red or ruddy). The ruddy complexion of a priest is here humorously compared to the shining face of Moses when coming from the mount. This ruddy complexion and the shining face are ironically treated as being a sign of Oates's sanctity or saintliness.

Plots exceeding man's belief—plots which could not be believed by a man; incredible plots. *future truths*—events which would take shape, and thus become true, in the future. The author is making fun of the statements that Titus Oates made. Statements which were

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not true at the time they were made were expected to become true in the time to come. *But where the witness .....spoke*—Statements which were untrue when they were made by Titus Oates were to be accepted as true because the future would establish their truth. Some of his statements were therefore to be regarded as the utterances of a prophet. *like visionary flights*—like the flights of imagination; utterly untrue. *The spirit caught him up*—he was overtaken by divine inspiration. *And gave him his Rabbinical degree.....foreign university*—And he got his degree of Doctor of Divinity, God knows from which university. He claimed that he had got this degree from the foreign university of Salamanca, but that university denied having conferred any degree on him.

let Israel's foes.....apocryphal (Lines 664-5)—Only the enemies of England could doubt the authenticity of the divine inspiration which he claimed. Only the enemies of England would be so rash as to declare that his utterances or pronouncements were false. *heavenly call*—divine urge. *his writ*—his pronouncements; his declarations. *apocryphal*—false; doubtful. *such affronts*—such insults; this kind of behaviour in challenging the authenticity of divine inspiration. *He takes.....trade* (Lines 667)—To take away from a man his source of livelihood is like murdering him. If a man earns his living by telling lies, exposing him would mean putting an end to his profession and therefore to his very life. The man who exposes such an evil-doer is therefore a murderer and should be punished with death. (This is, of course, ironically said).

Were I myself.....of my plot (Lines 668-671)—The poet says that, even if he himself had been in the witness box in place of Titus Oates, he would not tolerate anybody's discrediting his evidence. He would feel greatly insulted if anyone disbelieved his evidence. He would not spare such a person but would hit him hard. He would explore his mind and memory and invent some method of implicating that person in the same plot in connection with which he had appeared as a witness to furnish evidence for the prosecution. He might not of course refer to such a person as the principal accused in the plot, but he would definitely cite him as being an accomplice, maybe a minor accomplice.

Indulging latitude to deeds and words—showing leniency in judging the words and deeds. *Agag's murder*—Agag has been identified as Sir Edmund Godfrey. Sir Edmund Godfrey was the magistrate before whom Oates had affirmed on oath his account of the Popish Plot. Soon afterwards, Sir Edmund was found murdered, with his own sword thrust through his body. Dryden hints that Sir Edmund was murdered at the instigation of Oates because Sir Edmund was believed to be sympatheiic towards the Roman Catholics. (According to another interpretation, Agag stands for Lord Stafford, a Catholic peer who was executed in 1680 as a result of Oates's false evidence). *In terms as coarse as Samual used to Saul*—The prophet

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Samuel rebuked Saul for sparing the life of Agag. Dryden means to say that Titus Oates must have spoken in the same tone of rebuke while instigating the murder of Sir Edmund. (Agag in the Bible was the King of the Amalekites. Samuel had entrusted Saul with the task of murdering Agag, such being the command of God. But Saul took Agag prisoner and spared his life. Samuel rebuked Saul for this leniency and eventually killed Agag with his own hands. *The best that could be had for love or coin* (Line 679)—The best persons whom he could procure as witnesses either by getting their co-operation in the name of friendship or by bribing them.

(Lines 682—722)

And on his goodly person feed their eyes—the crowds felt very happy to see the handsome appearance of Monmouth. *On each side bowing popularly low*—bowing to the crowds on every side in a humble manner in order to win popularity. *frames*—moulds; adapts. *And with familiar ease repeats their names*—calls them by their names in a familiar and relaxed manner as if they were quite intimate with him. *Thus, formed by nature, furnished out with arts*—endowed by nature with a handsome appearance, and making use of all the devices by which one becomes popular. *He glides unfelt into their secret hearts*—He made his way into the hearts of the people without their being conscious of the effect on them. *sighs bespeaking pity*—sighs expressive of sympathy. *Hybla drops*—drops of honey obtained from bee-hives in Hybla. Hybla was a town in Sicily famous for its honey. *your lost estate*—your fallen prestige. A *banished man*—a man deprived of his right (to the throne). *Now all your liberties a spoil are made*—all your liberties have been assailed and taken away from you. *Egypt and Tyrus*—France and Holland. *intercept your trade*—take away your trade. *And Jebusites your sacred rites invade*—and your religious ceremonies have been attacked by the Roman Catholics who want to impose their own religion on you. *Charmed into ease*—leading a life of ease because of some spell that has been cast on him. *careless of his fame*—indifferent to his reputation. *foreign gold*—money obtained from foreign sources, like France. *Is grown in Bathsheba's embraces old*—has grown old in the embraces of his mistress, the Duchess of Portsmouth; spends all his time making love to the Duchess of Portsmouth, and is thus growing old. (According to the biblical story, David had developed adulterous relations with Bathsheba). *with that he wiped his eyes* (Line 717)—Saying so, he wiped the artificial tears from his eyes. Monmouth was shedding false tears of sympathy in order to create an impression on the people. *'Tis all the aid.....their fathers use*—Monmouth said that shedding tears of sympathy was all that he could do for the people in his present helpless condition. His tears were the only weapons that he could use against the King. No spy of the King could accuse him of treason for shedding tears of sympathy for the people and for protesting against the King. No

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father could punish a son as long as the son merely shed tears and did not lead an armed revolt against his father.

(Lines 723-768)

Messiah—saviour; here used for Monmouth whom people began to regard as their champion. *to ordain*—to decree; to proclaim. *a numerous train*—numberless followers and attendants. *And, like the sun.....the morning star* (Lines 732–33)—And he travelled all over the land just as the sun, moving across the sky, shines all over the land. This was for him the promised land, namely, the land over which, according to the promise of Shaftesbury, he would rule as a King. His fame preceded him wherever he went, just as the morning star shone everywhere in anticipation of his arrival. *consecrates* —sanctifies; lends a holy character to. *But hospitable treats did most commend/Wise Issachar*—but the greatest hospitality was shown to him by Thomas Thyne. Thomas Thyne (1648–82) was one of the richest men in England. After his quarrel with the Duke of York, Thomas Thyne became a strong supporter of Monmouth. In the Bible, Issachar is described as "a strong ass couching down between two burdens." The two burdens of Thomas Thyne were (*i*) the heavy expenditure of entertaining Monmouth, and (*ii*) his disastrous marriage to Lady Ogle, which was the subject of gossip in November, 1681. *did other ends disguise*—had other aims which were concealed from the people. *To sound the depths and fathom, where it went,/ The people's hearts*—This moving court (that is, Monmouth's procession) was intended to judge and assess the deepest feelings in the hearts of the people, wherever it went. *Yet all was coloured.....to their prince* (Lines 745–6)—Yet the whole thing had been given the appearance of having been organised as a mark of love and loyalty towards King Charles II, and on the surface this seemed to be a convincing motive. *specious*—seemingly true; apparently genuine but actually false.

Note. Lines 747–810 contain a very well argued case for the right of a King to demand unquestioned obedience from the people.

and good King David's life/Endangered by a brother and a wife (Line 750)—This has been interpreted in two ways : (*i*) An allegation had been made by Titus Oates that both the Queen and the Duke of York had plotted the death of Charles II, and (*ii*) the King's life had been endangered by (*a*) the fact that the King's brother, the Duke of York, was a Papist, and (*b*) that the Queen was responsible for the dispute regarding the succession to the throne because she had not been able to give birth to a child and heir. *in masquerade*—in disguise. *still, the same bait, and circumvented still*—misled by the same temptation and cheated in the same way; always deceived by the false promise of freedom from despotic rule. *Did ever men forsake.....a disease* (Lines 755-56)—The poet asks if people can make

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the mistake of giving up the life of comfort which they are leading and if they enjoy a healthy state, can wrongly imagine themselves to be diseased. (The idea is that the people are really as foolish as to mistake their own state of health as illness or disease and thus to aggravate their real political troubles by trying to cure them through innovation or fundamental change). *contingent mischiefs* —mischiefs which are yet to be plotted. *Make heirs for monarchs and for God decree ?*—Have people ever set up rightful claimants to the throne, and proclaimed them as heirs in the name of God ? *Then this resuming covenant.....for ever barred* (Lines 767-8)—The original contract by which Kings were appointed has absolute authority. It cannot be challenged subsequently. Once a King has been appointed, he can demand unquestioned obedience from the people. If Kings, are only officers in trust (as Shaftesbury maintained in line 411), this must have been the condition of their original appointment; otherwise it must have been permanently excluded. *resuming covenant*—people's right to take back the power given to the King by the terms of the contract.

(Lines 769-810)

If those who gave.....people's pleasure stand (Lines 769-76) —Those who originally appointed a King made it binding on their descendants to be loyal to the reigning monarch. When Adam disobeyed God's command, God imposed certain penalties on him. Those penalties had to be suffered not only by Adam himself but by all the descendants of Adam. The entire race of mankind is still suffering the consequences of Adam's disobedience to God. Although we were never a party to Adam's guilt, yet we too have to pay for that guilt. In the same way, the present generation has to offer an unquestioned obedience to the present King even though the first King was originally appointed by others. Those who entrusted the King with power and authority intended their descendants to continue to recognise that power and authority. If that be not so, Kings would become the slaves of those whose rulers they are. Kings would, in that event, be at the mercy of the whims of the people. (Adam was the first man. He lived in the Garden of Eden in the company of Eve, the first woman, but was expelled from there as a punishment for having eaten the forbidden fruit. Adam was condemned to a punishment the consequences of which mankind is suffering even today).

Add that the power.....dissolved by might ? (Lines 677-80)--Add to this the further fact that the people have wrongly been given the political power which they wield by virtue of the property they hold and which they misuse. Nobody can be sure of his personal rights if the rights of the King himself are in danger of being taken away. If people can liquidate the authority of the King by using force against him, no individual can feel confident that his rights are secure.

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And faultless Kings run down.....for tyranny (Lines 783-84) Even perfect Kings will then be condemned by the common people as being cruel and despotic.

Sanhedrins—parliaments. *the Godhead's images*—Kings who are the images of God and who derive their authority from God.

Yet grant our lords.....make them suffer more (Lines 795-98) — Yet assuming that the people are the masters and that they have the right to make Kings, they should not try to dislodge a King who is firmly established. If the people are wise or far-sighted, they would allow such a King to continue to reign. If they remove such a King on the ground that they are unhappy or miserable in his regine, they would merely be adding to their unhappiness or misery. A change of Kings cannot by itself bring about an improvement in the conditions of life.

innovation—change; here used for "revolution". *blow of fate* — fatal blow. *ancient fabrics*—ancient structures or institutions like Kingship. *nod and threat to fall*—have become so worn out as to be in danger of crumbling and failing. *To patch the flaws, and buttress up the wall*—to repair the damaged portions, and to strengthen or reinforce the supporting walls. *Thus far 'tis duty* — It is certainly the duty of the people to do so (that is, to repair the damage). *but here fix the mark*—but this is the limit to which they can go. *For all beyond it is to touch our Ark*— because to go beyond this limit means doing something unholy or impious. (Ark means a wooden chest or box in which the Jews deposited their holy tablets. Only priests were permitted to touch the Ark and it was regarded as an impious act for others to touch it). *To physic their disease into a worse* (Line 810)—Trying to cure this disease would lead to a further deterioration in the condition of the sufferer.

(Lines 811—863)

naming is to praise (Line 816)—In naming the supporters of the King, the poet wishes to praise them for their loyalty. *In this short file*—in this short list of the supporters of the King. *Barzillai* —Duke of Ormond (1610-88). He accompanied Charles II during the latter's exile, serving him faithfully during the time of his misfortunes on many important occasions. He was a man of unflinching loyalty to the King who knew the value of such a servant. (According to the biblical story, Barzillai lived beyond the Jordan river and sustained David during Absalom's rebellion). *In regions waste beyond the Jordan's flood*—In Ireland, where the Duke of Ormond served as Lord-Lieutenant. (Beyond the Jordan's flood means across the channel which lies between England and Ireland). *to buoy the state*—to keep the ship of the state afloat ; to save the state from collapsing. *The court he practised, not the courtier's art*—He frequented the court, but he did not suffer from the vices of hypocrisy and treachery. (A courtier is generally a

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man without any scruples. His flattery is generally hypocritical and deceptive). *The fighting warrior and recording Muse* (Line 828) —war-like and brave soldiers, and poets whose function it is to record events. The Duke of Ormond was Chancellor of the Universities of Dublin and Oxford. He was one of Dryden's patrons. *His bed could once.....is lost* (Lines 829-30)—Ormond had as many as ten children, but six of them had died. *His eldest hope*—his eldest son, Thomas, Earl of Ossory. *snatched in manhood's prime*—cut off in the prime of his life. *By unequal fates and providence's crime*—as a result of the injustice of fate and the cruelty of God. *Yet not before the goal of honour won*—However, he did not die before he had achieved glory. He was a refined and gallant young soldier who greatly distinguished himself in the first and second Dutch wars. He also fought against the French. He died of a fever when he was barely 47 years old. *narrow circle*—narrow sphere of action. *the fainting Tyrians*—the exhausted Dutch forces. *haughty Pharaoh* —the arrogant King of France, Louis, XIV, who was proving too powerful for the Dutch. The French King's progress in the war against the Dutch was arrested by the Earl of Ossory. *thy disencumbered soul* (Line 850)—the soul of the Earl of Ossory, which has been released from the body and is therefore free. *and leaves behind the clouds in starry poles*—and flies to heavenly regions beyond the clouds and beyond the highest stars. *thy kindred legions*—a multitude of noble souls similar to the soul of the Earl of Ossory. *No pinions can pursue immortal height* (Line 855)—even the wings of the poetic Muse cannot reach the heavenly regions where the souls of noble human beings go. *another He*—another man like the Earl of Ossory.

(Lines 864—913)

Zadoc the priest—William Sancroft, created Archbishop of Canterbury in January 1678. He was a singularly modest and retiring man. *lowly mind*—humble mind. *Sagan of Jerusalem*—Henry Compton, promoted to the position of Bishop of Oxford in December 1674, and afterwards transferred to London. *noble stem*—noble stock. *Him of the western dome*—John Dolben, who occupied several high ecclesiastical offices, including that of the Dean of Westminster. "The western dome" in Line 868 refers to Westminster Abbey. *The prophet's sons*—the pupils studying at Westminster Abbey. *by such example led*—inspired by the example of the Dean of Westminster who was an eloquent preacher. *colleges* —religious or schoiastic institutions. *Sharp-judging Adriel..... Muse's friend./Himself a Muse* (Line 877)—John Sheffied, Earl of Mulgrave. He was the Muse's friend, because he was a patron of poets, being also a patron of Dryden. He is called a Muse himself because he wrote much verse (though his verses are of an inferior quality). *whom David's love.....were torn* (Lines 880-81)—"disobedient son" refers to Monmouth. When Monmouth was deprived of his offices and honours in 1679, the Earl of Mulgrave was made

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Lord-Lieutenant of the East Riding and Governor of Hull, both positions having earlier been held by Monmouth.

Jotham (Line 882)—George Savile, Marquis of Halifax. He was one of the most brilliant statesmen of the seventeenth century. He opposed the Exclusion Bill in the House of Lords, and its defeat was mainly due to his eloquence. He was the leader of a small party which professed neither to be Whig nor Tory, but to avoid the extremes of both factions. Here he is depicted as a supporter of the King because of his opposition to the Exclusion Bill. The object of the Exclusion Bill was to disqualify James, Duke of York, for succession to the throne. *who but only tried/The worse awhile, then chose the better side*—For a time, the Marquis of Halifax was a supporter of the Whig Party, but subsequently sided with the King. "The worse" here refers to the Whig party, and "the better" to the King's party. *but turned the balance too*—prevented the Whigs from scoring a victory; brought about the defeat of the Exclusion Bill by opposing it. *Hushai* (Line 888)—Laurence Hyde, who was appointed in 1679 one of the Commissioners of the Treasury. He was a strong champion of the King. *By foreign treaties he informed his youth*—He gained a lot of knowledge and experience by having negotiated treaties with foreign countries when he was yet in his thirties. *His frugal care supplied the wanting throne*—By his wise management of government funds, he enabled the King to ride over the political storm. *but bounteous of his own*—but he was generous in spending his own money. *when Exchequers flow*—when the treasury is full of money. *the low*—when the treasury is almost empty. *For sovereign power .....crowds buy* (Lines 896–97)—The power of a King is very little when he is forced to barter away his privileges for money. His power is very great when the people find themselves in a condition in which they are forced to buy his favours. *Indulge one labour more, my weary Muse* (Line 898)—The poet calls upon the weary Muse to agree to perform one more labour. The poet means to say that, although he has already spent a lot of time and energy on his task and is feeling tired, he would yet like to perform one more labour, namely that of introducing Amiel. **Amiel**—Edward Seymour. He was the Speaker of the House of Commons from 1673–79. Macaulay gives him high praise for the manner in which he conducted himself as the Speaker. He was among those who opposed the Exclusion Bill and supported the King's party. *That, as their band.....them ail* (Lines 906–7)—Just as the House of Commons, though a small body, represented all the people of England, so Edward Seymour, the Speaker, could be regarded as the representative of the entire House of Commons. *Now rasher charioteers the seat ascend*—now persons of a reckless nature occupy the office of the Speaker. *They, like the unequal ruler.....mistake the way* (Lines 910–11)—Edward Seymour's successors may be compared to Phaeton who, being unable to control the horses of the chariot of the sun-god, caused a confusion in the seasons. "Unequal ruler" refers to Phaeton who could not maintain the equilibrium of the chariot. *Misguide the seasons*

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—confuse the seasons; confuse political issuess. *smiles*—feels amused to see their foolish manner of conducting the proceedings of the House of Commons. *the Sabbath of his toils*—rest from his labours; retirement from his hard duties.

(Lines 914—938)

in the breach who dared to stand/And tempt.....the land—These were the King's supporters who had the courage to defend him and to face the combined attack of the King's opponents. *to tempt*—to brave; to challenge; to provoke and to face. *To batter down*—to defeat and to crush. *with pretended frights/In Sanhedrins to plume the regal rights*—This large party aimed at snatching away the rights of the King by attacking him in parliament. They tried to gain support by pretending that the country was faced with a grave crisis. *with pretended frights*—by pretending to be afraid of the danger threatening the country. *But lenitives fomented the disease*—but lenient or conciliatory measures by the King would serve merely to aggravate the situation. *That Shimei taught Jerusalem to curse* (Line 932)—Slingsby Bethel (the sheriff of London) fully exploited the situation and by his machinations caused so much resentment against the King that the people of London began to curse the King's government. *His train*—his followers and supporters. *their maker in their master hear*—They heard the intentions and thoughts of God in the voice of their King. *maker*—God. *master*—King.

(Lines 939—970)

by native mercy swayed (Line 939)— influenced by natural sympathy. *My wrongs dissembled*—thrown a veil on the injustices that I have suffered; covered up the wrongs done to me; overlooked the misconduct of my opponents. *they slight*—they hold in contempt. *my forgiving right*—my right to pardon (the offenders). *That one was made for many.....a monarch's end* (Lines 945-6)—According to my enemies, the King was made for the benefit of the people. But they do not realise that the King was made to govern the people. The object of having a monarch is that he should benefit the people by ruling them. *Though manly tempers can the longest bear* (Line 948)—though persons who are brave have the maximum patience. The King means that his opponents should not misinterpret his patience as weakness. *not good by force*—not good under compulsion, but good voluntarily. *my young Samson*—Monmouth who considers himself to be as strong and brave as Samson.

Samson—the name of a Biblical hero. He was a man of extraordinary strength. He fell a victim to his enemies. He lost his strength and was blinded and put in prison. But his strength returned, and he killed a large number of his enemies by pulling down a column and bringing down the roof on them, though he himself was killed too. *Had God ordained.....another turn* (Lines 963-64) — If God had decreed that Monmouth should rule an empire, God

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would have given a different shape to Monmouth's soul. In other words, if God had intended that Monmouth should become the King, God would have seen to it that Monmouth was born a legitimate son of the ruling King. *Gulled with a patriot's name*—deceived by being called a patriot. *The people's brave*—a villain or a desperado encouraged by the people or enjoying the support of the people. *Whence comes it.....David's cause* (Line 969-70)—How it is possible that the cause of religion and the observance of the laws should be dearer to Monmouth than to the King himself ?

(Lines 971—1001)

His old instructor—the old Earl of Shaftesbury who is guiding or instigating Monmouth. *Let Sanhedrins be taught to give their own* (Line 976)—Let the members of parliament surrender their own rights instead of trampling upon my rights by forcing me to accept Monmouth as my heir. *And mine as requisite as their consent*—I being the King, my consent is as necessary as the consent of the members of parliament. *But Esau's hand suit ill with Jacob's voice* (Line 982)—but they are merely practising deception on me. They seek my approval to their choice of the heir, but actually they want to force my hands. They are employing a trick similar to the one which Esau employed when he spoke to his father in the pretended voice of his brother Jacob. *unsatiate as the barren womb or grave* (Line 987)—never satisfied, like the barren womb or the grave. The Bible tells us that there are four things that are never satisfied : the grave; the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and fire. *Such votes as make a part exceed the whole* (Line 994)—absurd opinions or views like thinking that a part is greater than the whole. The part can never be greater than the whole. Even if the people were to vote by a large majority that a part is greater than the whole, their opinion would yet be wrong. *O that my power.....another kind* ? (Lines 999-1001)—The King wishes that he did not have unlimited power to pardon offenders. He deplores the fact that he, like God, is compelled, against his own will, to inflict exemplary punishment on those who commit wrongs. *Must I at length.....necessary law* (Lines 1002-3)—The King is sorry that he has at last to inflict punishment on those who have been opposing him. Law has necessarily to be enforced, though its enforcement will bring evil consequences for the wrong-doers. It is unwillingly that the King will deal strongly with his enemies and crush them.

(Lines 1002—1031)

How ill my fear they by my mercy scan—how wrongly my enemies interpret my mercy as my fear. *scan*—measure; assess. The King means that his enemies interpret his forgiving nature as his fear of them. *Law they require, let law then show her face.....and die* (Lines 1006-9)—My opponents insist on the implementation of the law. Let them then face the law and its consequences. They have not

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been satisfied with my mercy. I will now show them how strong and relentless law can be. So far they have been able to see only the rear parts of the law, the rear part which consists in grace, just as Moses was able to have only a rear view of God. Had Moses been allowed to see the front view of God, he would have perished. My opponents will now be allowed to have a front view of the law, and they will perish. They will not be able to withstand all the rigours of the law, just as Moses could not have survived seeing the dazzling and blinding light of God. *dire artificers of death*—desperate contrivers or manipulators of death.

Against themselves.....of life before (Lines 1012-15)—The witness produced by these persons will ultimately give evidence against them and thus prove hostile to the very persons who had originally bribed them to swear against the King. In this way these winesses will establish the utter falsity of the Popish Plot. In doing so they will behave exactly like the young vipers which tear themseles from the womb of their mother and feed on the blood of the very creature which had conceived and sustained them. (The idea is that the very witnesses who had sworn to the genuineness of the Popish Plot will now swear to its falsity, thus discrediting and ruining persons like Shaftesbury and Monmouth who had hired them).

Belial—devil; follower of Satan. *Belzebub*—the prince of devils. *Their Belial.....will fight* (Line 1016)—The wicked ones will fight against their own leaders. (The devils will revolt against their own Prince). *Thus on my foes.....right* (Line 1017)—My enemies (the witnesses) will fight against my opponents (those who bribed the witnesses)—and will, in this way, rectify the wrong done to me. *Nor doubt the event*—Nor is there any reason to doubt what the outcome will be. (That is, my enemies will definitely perish).

He said (Line 1026)—This is the conventional way in which a writer brings to a close the speech of an epic hero. Here, of course, these two words produce a comic effect. (See also Line 477 where Shaftesbury's speech is brought to a close). *And peals of thunder .....firmament*—The sky was shaken by the roar of thunder. (The peel of thunder in ancient epics was a sign that a prayer had been heard and granted by God). *Henceforth a series of new time began*—From that time onwards a new era in the history of England began. *Knew their lawful Lord* (Line 1031)—recognised their rightful monarch.

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"A gallery of Portraits" is the name given to Absolam and Achitophel" by Sir Walter Scott

14

Important Questions with Answers

Q. 1. (*a*) **"The supreme excellence of** *Absalom And Achitophel* **lies in its sketches of character." Discuss.**

Or

Discuss the art of characterisation in *Absalom And Achitophel.*

Or

Comment on Dryden's art of characterisation, illustrating your answer from the First Part of *Absalom And Achitophel.*

Or

Write an essay on Dryden's skill in portraying characters, taking your illustrations from the First Part of *Absalom And Achitophel.*

(*b*) **"We have from Dryden magnificent portraits of his opponents, sketched with a large geniality even in the condemnation." To what extent is this true of** *Absalom and Achitophel* **?**

Ans. (*a*) "A gallery of portraits" : this is how Sir Walter Scott described *Absalom And Achitophel.* The portraits with which this poem abounds especially reveal the art of Dryden. In these portraits we admire the very fine sense of delicate touch ; the felicity of picturesque characterisation ; above all, as Coleridge said, the living truth of organic wholes. Nowhere else do we find so free a display of Dryden's classicism, enriched and set off as it is by a romanticism of the imagination.

What is striking about Dryden's characterisation is the variety of treatment which Dryden displays in his presentation of the various personalities involved. Each of the characters is sketched differently. Some characters are drawn as full-length portraits ; some are "cut out but for a picture to the waste" (like Absalom), or are there by inference only (David, for instance) ; some are little

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more than named, and form units of a composite portrait larger than themselves.

The characters in this poem fall into two groups. There is the group of the plotters or the mal-contents; and there are the true loyalists ("faithful band of worthies") In other words, the rogues' gallery of Whigs is balanced by a series of portraits of the king's supporters. Each group is controlled by a unifying factor. In the case of the mal-contents, this unifying factor is the feeling of a restless, uncontrollable, misdirected energy which is the hall-mark of violence. In the case of the king's supporters, the unifying factor is an awareness of the calm resolution with which this equally powerful source is willingly employed in the service of law and order. (Group of Kings - Two noblemen and Two Commoners)

The group of the king's opponents consists of two noblemen and two commoners, and we perceive a graded descent from the lofty arraignment of Achitophel to the abusive scorn heaped upon Corah. The main target, of course, is Achitophel whose portrait is written in an almost uniformly "high" style, so that Achitophel becomes a character in a heroic poem. This portrait offers an example of the way in which biting satire may be written without humour. Dryden wants us to take this portrait seriously. We are expected to see Achitophel as a very real danger to the security of the State and the peace of men's minds, and therefore Dryden employs a serious and elevated manner of writing in drawing this character-sketch. At no point does this portrait degenerate into a mere lampoon. Achitophel is presented almost exclusively in moral terms. An examination of the epithets applied to him is quite revealing. He is intellectually gifted, being "sagacious"; his wits are "great", and his eyes "discerning"; but these qualities are combined with a fundamentally unstable temperament in which only a thin line divides his wits from madness. The adjectives used for him are dignified and never simply abusive. Their accumulation suggests a volcanic energy which must erupt, regardless of the disaster that might ensue thereafter. These adjectives are: turbulent, bold, restless, unfixed, unpleased, impatient, wild, prodigal, daring, implacable. Dryden employs familiar imagery and certain rhetorical devices in portraying this character. Thus Achitophel has a pigmy body which he "fretted to decay" because he could not please it. The phrase "tenement of clay" used for the body reminds us of the burial service and therefore of the shortness of man's life. Dryden deplores Achitophel's abuse of both his talent and his energy, and in Lines 180-91, he praises Achitophel's authority and integrity as a judge. This praise lies well within the tradition of epic magnanimity or the satirical convention.* A further

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* The satirical convention as expressed by Mulgrave in his Essay *Satire*:

> Though satire nicely writ, no humour stings
> But those who merit praise in other things.

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effect of this praise is that of impartiality : by praising Achitophel's good qualities, Dryden is able to give the impression that he is telling the whole truth and this in turn increases the validity of his condemnation.

The portrait of Zimri (the Duke of Buckingham) is likewise presented with a feeling of regret for the waste of one of the "princes of the land". There is no praise of Zimri, but the satire does not carry too sharpe an edge. Zimri is thus presented as a harmless, but meddlesome, nobleman playing at a game of politics which is beyond his powers. He is not as formidable a figure as Achitophel. His irresponsibility makes him totally unfitted to be a leader. Unlike Achitophel, he is shown as ineffectual ; he could never be chief ; he was "wicked but in will". As Dryden's intention here is to ridicule the Duke of Buckingham, the style is slightly "lower" than that of Achitophel's portrait :

> Then all for women, painting, rhyming, drinking
> Besides ten thousand freaks that died in thinking.

Zimri shares with Achitophel and the other mal-contents an absence of all self-control. Everything he does is "in extremes". His opinions are "stiff", but they are wrong and short-lived. He has a rich estate but he squanders it in rewarding everything but patient merit. He has the "courtier's art" but is laughed from the court. He is everything "in the course of one revolving moon". This portrait is written more in jest than in earnest. Accordingly, Dryden employs a tone of urbanity and shows a conversational ease in writing it. Dryden himself felt very enthusiastic about the skill he had shown in writing this portrait, and he considered it worth the whole poem. One ingredient of this skill is the concentration of nouns and adjectives applied to Zimri, with the result that the multiplicity of his activities is made to appear almost bewildering.

The two commoners—Shimei (Slingsby Bethel) and Corah (Titus Oates) are handled differently. These two portraits are distinguished from the severe arraignment of Achitophel by their amusing tone of mockery. They are distinguished from the fine raillery of Zimri by their abusive contempt. Shimei represents the insolent hypocrite and the blasphemer of God's anointed. He is depicted as "the wretch who heaven's anointed dared to curse". Like the others, he misdirected his energy. The one thing which, besides his vituperation against the king, interested him was the amassing of wealth. He covered his money-making by a show of piety. Whenever two or three persons gathered together to denounce the king, Shimei was always to be seen among their midst. He was a great miser, too. His cellars stocked no wines, and his cooks remained idle : "Cool was his kitchen, though his brains were hot". There is a lot of wit and humour in the drawing of this portrait. Dryden here employs a series of anti-climaxes, first showing us the public image of the man, and then exposing what lies behind that image. Shimei gave early promises of "zeal to

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God", but also of hatred to the king. He refrained from sins, but only from the expensive kind of sins. He never broke the Sabbath, but broke it only for gain. He respected the laws of Moses, the more so because they were the product of many days of fasting which appealed to his miserliness. His abstemious behaviour is not a virtue, being a result of his frugality. It is a masterly portrayal combining apparent virtues with manifest vices.

The worst of Dryden's abusive scorn is seen in his portrayal of Corah (or Titus Oates). This is only appropriate because of Corah's low position and pernicious behaviour. This portrayal is more intimately related to the original than the others, because it connects specific physical attributes with the qualities of temperament which they reveal. The connection is, of course, ironic. His sunken eyes and his jarring voice showed that he was not ill-tempered or proud ! His long chin showed that he was witty ! His ruddy complexion made his face shine like the face of Moses coming down from Mount Sinai, and showed his saintly character ! He had a great memory by virtue of which he could give accounts of plots which had never taken place ! His stock of facts included certain supposed truths about the future ! He had such an ardent religious zeal that it made him heap insults on the king ! He was responsible for the murder of Sir Edmund Godfrey. All references to Corah's talents are sarcastic, except for his talent for vice. His "monumental brass" recalls the brazen serpent of Moses that saved the Israelites, as Corah would save England by the fantastic impudence of his lies ! Corah's portrait is the most abusive in the poem. Corah is the target of withering contempt and personal abuse.

In the portrait of Corah, we have come a long way from the lofty arraignment of Achitophel. Dryden pours contemptuous scorn, first on Corah's social status and then on his lack of ability. From a tremendous threat to the country led by "great wits" and "princes of the land", the plot has here become a grotesque comedy of upstart jesters. It is because his birth was base that Oates wished to shine, to seek fame or notoriety. Dryden sees the motives of this weaver's son for what they are, and not for what Oates claimed them to be. Oate's actions are seen by Dryden as monstrous acts and not for what Oates believed them to be—the superhuman deeds of an "arch-attestor for the public good".

There is no formal portrait of Absalom, but the presentation of this person is made with much subtlety. It consists of commenting favourably on Absalom while allowing him to condemn himself out of his own mouth. A double image is thus produced, of Absalom as the handsome, deceived youth and as the ambitious, deceitful man. The portrait of Absalom is characterised by its own tone, which verges closely on praise. Dryden expresses a benevolent regret in the line : " 'Tis juster to lament him than accuse". Dryden uses every opportunity to establish Absalom's "excellent nature". None

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is "so beautiful, so brave". All his actions are "accompanied with grace". He is not "stained with cruelty nor puffed with pride". Absalom's weaknesses belong to destiny which should have "higher placed his birth, or not so high". But at line 363, and in his subsequent speeches, Absalom must take the responsibility for his conduct. He deceives not only himself but also, in turn, the admiring crowd who are "dazzled with surprise", as he too had been lured by Achitophel's offer of power.

Then there is the other group of characters, namely the supporters of the king. The loyalists are not presented with such vividness or at such length as the mal-contents, because there was no such need in their case. The brief but telling sketches of these persons form a composite picture of the virtues which have graced mankind at all times. These sketches are written in a different tone. Here we find Dryden using a basic poetic idiom which is capable of elevation. Barzillai (the Duke of Ormonde) is the first to be mentioned. This man had shared the sufferings of Charles in the years of the latter's exile. He "practised the court, not the courtier's art". "Large was his wealth, but larger was his heart." He had the discrimination to select the noblest objects for his attention and affection.

The portrait of Barzillai's son (the Earl of Ossory) is designed not only as supplementary to that of his father but also as a contrast to that of Absalom and to that of Achitophel's son. Unlike Absalom, he was obedient to both the king and his father and he "all parts fulfilled of subject and of son". He possessed all the graces, unlike Achitophel's son who was "born a shapeless lump, like anarchy".

Then there is Zadoc the priest (William Sancroft, the Archbishop of Canterbury), who avoided power and position because of his modesty and humility. Sagan of Jerusalem (Henry Compten, the Bishop of London) came of a noble stock and had a hospitable nature. "Him of the western dome" (John Dolben, the Dean of Westminster) was a preacher of heavenly eloquence. These men form a significant comparison with Corah. Like him, they are men of religious fervour, but unlike Corah they are loyal to the king and they do not seek promotion through their tongues.

Among the king's supporters is Jotham (George Savile), a man of piercing wit and fertile thought, who was gifted by nature, and taught by learning, to influence and sway audiences. Then there is Hushai (Laurence Hyde) who, as First Lord of the Treasury, had exercised great economy in public expenditure and yet shown a large-heartedness in spending his own money. Adriel (the Earl of Mulgrave) was a patron of poets and men of letters, and himself a poet. Finally, there is Amiel (Edward Seymour): "Who can Amiel's praise refuse?" Unlike Corah and Shimei, this man was guided by reason and not by visions, and instead of inflaming his own passion he cooled that of others.

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The sketches of the king's supporters form a composite portrait of unquestionable virtue which makes the king's cause appear just and its success inevitable. The small numerical strength of this group serves to enhance not only their own courage and integrity but also the king's moral victory when it comes.

"The supreme excellence of *Absalom And Achitophel* lies in its descriptions of character. Dryden's exquisite etchings live in the memory with unequalled tenacity. The pre-eminence of Achitophel among the opponents of the royal government is unmistakably signalised by his being commissioned to master the shaken virtue of Absalom. When the satire proceeds from the leader to the followers, no composite body of mal-contents has ever been analysed with surer discernment and more perfect insight."

(*b*) Enough has been said above regarding the portraits of the king's opponents (who might also be regarded as Dryden's opponents) It has to be admitted that Dryden has sketched the characters of these persons in a genial manner even though the object is to condemn them and to lower them in our estimation. The portrait of Achitophel is certainly rather grim. That is so because Dryden wants us to take this portrait seriously, as the portrait of a man who spelt real danger to the security of the State. Although the element of humour is not much in evidence in this portrait, yet touches of humour are not absolutely lacking. When Dryden points out that "Great wits are sure to madness near allied/ And thin partitions do their bounds divide", we do feel amused to think of the application of this generalisation to the case of the Earl of Shaftesbury. Again, there is certainly something amusing about the lines in which Dryden tells us that the Earl of Shaftesbury's son was conceived at a moment when the Earl's mind was taxed by confusing thoughts, the consequence being that the son was "born a shapeless lump, like anarchy".

Zimri, or the Duke of Buckingham, has been depicted in a most amusing manner. Dryden's gifts of irony and sarcasm are nowhere employed with a better effect than here. Dryden was of the opinion that his sketch of this man was worth the whole poem. This was an exaggerated opinion, but there is no doubt about the brilliance of this portrait and its genial and witty quality. Zimri, we are told, was so various that he seemed to be not one individual, but all mankind's epitome. He constantly changed his ideas as also his hobbies and occupations. In the course of one single month he showed himself by turns as an alchemist, a fiddler, a statesman and a buffoon. He was like a madman, who tried to employ every hour of his life in something new to enjoy. All this is very funny. There is very little of abuse in this portrait. Dryden depicts Zimri more as a fool than as a knave. In just twenty-six lines, Dryden gives us a picture of variety, extremity, instability, and folly, of unresolved contradictions becoming mere ridiculous futility at last.

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In lines 569-582, Dryden speaks about certain miscellaneous opponents of the king. They included lords, wits, warriors, Puritan sympathisers. Dryden makes satirical references to Hastings, Grey, Howard, and Sir William Jones, with the multitude ("the rascal rebel") thrown in. In mentioning such persons, Dryden refers to their dullness, talkativeness, lechery, hypocrisy, etc. In this description we have more of contempt or abuse than of wit or humour. It is not possible to maintain that Dryden is genial in this passage of condemnation.

Shimei (Slingsby Bethel)

In the portrait of Shimei (Slingsby Bethel), we have a series of anti-climaxes, and a clash of opposites. Shimei showed a "zeal to God", but a "hatred to his king". He never broke the Sabbath but for gain. He never uttered an oath or curse except against the government. His hand held the staff of justice, but "his neck was loaded with a chain of gold" He accumulated wealth by the most ready way, which was to cheat and pray. He was a persuasive writer, but he tried to persuade the people that kings were useless. In all these cases, the first part in each sentence is followed by an anti-climax in the second part. We are led each time to hope that there is some good in the man but each time we find surprise waiting for us. His greed and his miserliness are especially emphasised His cooks, with long disuse, had forgotten their skill : his kitchen was almost cold ; and he fed his servants with spiritual food. All this is very amusing. We are further amused on being told that he respected Moses all the more because Moses fasted for many days Shimei used his office to pervert the aims of law and justice which he had sworn to uphold. His personal abstemiousness is not a virtue but only another aspect of his greed. He combines impiety and rebellion with lowness and meanness. This portrait is undoubtedly a bitter condemnation, but the condemnation is relieved by humour and mirth which are indicative of Dryden's geniality.

There is no geniality in the character of Corah (Titus Oates). This is the most scornful and contemptuous sketch in the poem. We have here come a long way from the lofty arraignment of Achitophel. Corah is described as monumental brass which recalls the brazen serpent of Moses ; but while that serpent saved the Israelites, Corah would doubtless ruin the people. "Brass" here might also represent a brainless head. Corah's low birth is ridiculed. Corah was the son of a weaver but, says the author ironically, great actions may as well be performed by the son of a weaver as by the son of a king. Corah's sunken eyes, harsh voice, long chin, and ruddy complexion are ironically linked to several evil features of his character. His religious zeal made him despise the king and heap insults on him ! He was most probably responsible for having instigated the murder of Sir Edmund Godfrey. He tried to procure as many witnesses of the Popish Plot as he could get for love and for money. There are certainly some amusing touches in this portrait but, on the whole, we get a merciless exposure of a false, scheming, fraudulent and hypocritical man. Corah has

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been depicted as the most odious and despicable in a large crowd of fools and scoundrels.

Thus it is difficult to agree that all the condemnatory portraits in this poem show a geniality of treatment. In certain cases there is bitter and grim hatred, and in certain others there is sheer contempt and abuse. Only in one or two sketches do we find a geniality in the treatment of character.

Q. 2. Comment on Dryden's use of the Bible in *Absalom And Achitophel*.

Ans. When Dryden wrote *Absalom And Achitophel*, the similarity between certain incidents related in the Old Testament of the Bible and the situation which prevailed in Dryden's time had already been observed and pointed out. Charles II was often compared to King David, and Achitophel was a familiar term for an evil counsellor. In 1680, a hostile pamphleteer had compared Monmouth to Absalom ; in 1681, a satirist had likened Shaftesbury to Achitophel. The Puritans had used the name Achitophel for the advisers of Charles I, and the Royalists had also adapted the biblical story to their needs. At the Restoration, many preachers and poets had emphasised the similarities between the fortunes of David and those of Charles II ; and the events of 1670's increased the potentialities of the story of Absalom as a political allegory. Several Tory propagandists had used it in 1680. For instance, they described the Whigs as "they that set on Absalom to steal away the hearts of the people from the king" ; and they warned all young people "to beware of such counsellors as the old Achitophel".

Thus, by applying the story of David, Absalom, and Achitophel to current politics, Dryden was doing nothing new or original. He was using a story and names which were already well-known. Of course, Dryden made use of many unfamiliar biblical names also. Having adopted the three familiar biblical names for the principal characters (David for Charles II, Achitophel for Shaftesbury and Absalom for Monmouth), Dryden went on to use other biblical names for various other contemporaries—Michal for Charles II's Queen, Zimri for Buckingham, Balaam for the Earl of Huntingdon, Caleb for Lord Grey, Nadab for Lord Howard, Shimei for Slingsby Bethel, Corah for Titus Oates, and so on. Dryden's poem was the imaginative elaboration of these comparisons on a large scale. With great ingenuity and wit, he drew Hebrew and English history together into a pattern, and enriched his allegory with a wealth of secondary allusions to the Bible.

Dryden gains several advantages by the use of the Old Testament story as the allegorical framework for his poem. He wrote a mock-heroic poem on a biblical subject. Much of the enjoyment of the English reader of the poem springs from an easy recognition of the historical personalities behind the biblical masks. Besides, the Old Testament framework lends an air of sacred truth to a modern

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Reading of the poem creates an impression that man's revolt against his king is a recurrent phenomenon in history.

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story, and creates the impression that man's revolt against his king is a recurrent phenomenon in history. Indeed, Dryden's treatment of the biblical narrative subtly suggests that this revolt offers a parallel to Adam's revolt against God, ensuing from Adam's surrender to the temptation of the Devil. And we must remember that to the seventeenth-century reader the Bible was the most familiar and authoritative book to which a poet could allude. Dryden suggests the following three parallels : (*i*) God, King David, and King Charles II ; (*ii*) Adam, Absalom, and the Duke of Monmouth ; (*iii*) Devil, Achitophel, and the Earl of Shaftesbury. In other words, Dryden equates the contemporary revolt against King Charles II with the scriptural accounts of the revolts by Adam and by Absalom. In this way, Dryden morally won his case even before he started writing the poem. Dryden's use of the biblical allegory achieves a curious, three-dimensional effect by enabling him to show that it had all happened before, was happening in his time, and might well happen again. A part of Dryden's purpose was to point out that history repeats itself and that what was happening in his time was more or less a recurring pattern of events.

By his use of the biblical story, Dryden gained several other advantages also. For instance, Dryden gained the freedom to manipulate the characters just as he liked. He selected and adapted such features of the familiar archetypal figures as he required for his purposes in the poem. Secondly, Dryden was able to project his theme of temptation, the illegality of rebellion, the corruption of politicians, on to a neutral set of circumstances. He projected these themes on to a group of characters in whose fates the readers were not personally involved. This principle of apparent objectivity, of moral detachment, is very necessary to certain kinds of satire. (It is at work in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*). Thirdly, Dryden was able to impose the mythical characters of David, Achitophel, and Absalom upon the contemporary historical ones. David represents the benign father ; Achitophel represents the scheming, ambitious, false counsellor, and Absalom represents the wilful, handsome, gullible youth. In the eyes of readers of those times, the names which Dryden adopted assumed the status of a kind of metaphor, capable of calling up many more associations than the real names of the characters. It is true that a certain kind of satirical effect can be obtained by the use of actual names in a mock-heroic context. Dryden himself had used actual names in his *MacFlecknoe*, and Pope was to do so in his *Dunciad*, but this only serves to show that Dryden was clearly aiming at a more elevated effect.

As has already been said, there was nothing very original in the adoption of biblical names. In fact, it was exactly because of this absence of novelty, and because of the element of familiarity, that the poem produced its effects. For the readers of Dryden's time, these mythical (biblical) characters were something of a commonplace. In 1627, Nathaniel Carpenter's *Achitophel Or the*

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Wicked Politician had anticipated Dryden's use of the David-Absalom story. In *David's Troubles Remembered* (1638), the praise of Absalom occurs in a form closely resembling Dryden's and Achitophel is attacked in familiar style. There were several other such anticipations (which have already been noted above). In making use of this tradition, Dryden was not betraying a want of originality but adopting what was already available : a well-known story of a kind father, a rebellious son, and a spiteful counsellor. Thus he had only to employ the name Achitophel to find that a part of the effect which he was aiming at had already been achieved. The name Achitophel had powerful associations for the readers of that time. Names like Judas, Machiavelli, Shylock, and Micawber have powerful associations even for men of our own time.

Lastly, the frequent biblical allusions act as metaphor, operating in various ways to give the poem depth and perspective. Thus Absalom is a "second Moses", a "cloudy pillar", and a "guardian fire". He "shows the promised land" and is a "young Messiah". David appears to his people as God had appeared to Moses and speaks with divine wrath :

> Laws they require, let Law then show her face ;
> They could not be content to look on grace.

The false gods of the conflicting religious factions are no better than their political shibboleth : "that golden calf, a State". Shimei's canting hypocrisy is exposed as a parody of the Christian ideal, for he "loved his wicked neighbour as himself". In such lines Dryden's use of biblical association enables him to achieve a rather special effect. This line is not, as some people think, blasphemous. Nor is the following triplet blasphemous in intention :

> When two or three were gathered to declaim
> Against the monarch of Jerusalem,
> Shimei was always in the midst of them.

Both these quotations are, indeed, parodies of the scriptures, in exactly the way in which Shimei is a parody of the Christian ideal, and they make Dryden's point as no other method would have done. We see Shimei's hypocrisy enacted before us as we read these lines. In the case of the portrait of Corah (Titus Oates), the biblical overtones are also quite strong. Like Oates the original Corah was a leveller who challenged the authority of Moses and, like Oates, the original Corah was responsible for the fate of innocent men who met a sad end. Dryden is careful to point these allusions in order to produce an effect of irony in relation to Corah's imagined religious sanctions similar to that of the parody in the exposure of Shimei's hypocrisy. Corah was a member of the tribe entrusted with the care of the Tabernacle, and as such assumed peculiar privilege. Oates, likewise, presumed to take too much upon himself.

12 Not all the facts of David and Absalom correspond to the circumstances of Charles II and Monmouth. The dramatic events

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of Absalom's death and King David's weeping over that death, for instance, had no parallel in the contemporary political situation, and so Dryden could not have included them. Dryden in fact expected a reconciliation between King Charles II and the Duke of Monmouth. According to the biblical story, Achitophel's advice is not taken and he hangs himself. Absalom, riding on a mule, is caught by the head in the branches of an oak tree, and is killed by Joab and others. King David's reaction to the news of his son's death is given in lines which have become famous: "O, my son, Absalom, my son, my son. Absalom! Would to God I had died for thee, O, Absalom, my son. my son!" This circumstance could not, of course, be used by Dryden in any way.

There were serious difficulties in the way of lending any kind of grandeur to a contemporary political subject. The very familiarity of the political subject-matter was in this respect against the poet. Such unavoidable words as "parliament", "jury", "writ" and "committee" defy an elevated medium. Such words would have reduced Dryden's poem to the mock-heroic level. The biblical allegory helped Dryden to raise his poem to a dignified level without falling into bathos. There is yet another advantage of the biblical allegory. The fact that such figures as the King, the Tempter, and the Mob, are so readily recognised carries the action a step further from the realm of mere political wrangling in the direction of universal philosophical or poetic truth.

The biblical allegory helped Dryden in dealing with Charles II's sexual promiscuity. The comparison between Charles and David gains in appropriateness by both of them having produced a large number of bastards. Charles had to be defended against the charge of immorality. The use of the biblical allusion hints at a possible divine approval of the sexual promiscuity of David and therefore of Charles. When Dryden says that David "scattered his Maker's image through the land", we are reminded of the biblical version that God created man in His own image and we are made to feel that David (Charles) was merely carrying on God's work. Biblical allusion in this context may, of course, alienate some readers by its apparent cynicism, and some readers may feel annoyed by Dryden's effort to extenuate what may seem to them immoral and foolish behaviour But Dryden's cynicism is directed not against faith but against those who abuse it in the temporal world. Perphaps Dryden was in reality criticising Charles II's conduct in an oblique manner. But it is also possible that Dryden was aiming at a jocular acceptance by the reader of Charles-David's promiscuity.

Q. 3 Comment on Dryden's use of history in *Absalom and Achitophel*.

Or

Would you regard *Absalom And Achitophel* as a reliable mirror to the period with which it deals ?

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Ans. *Absalom And Achitophel* deals with a political crisis which England faced during the years 1679-81. Charles II became King of England in 1660. His reign is generally known as the Restoration (meaning the restoration of monarchy in England). The poem deals with the crisis that was caused by the problem of the succession to the throne. Charles II had married Catherine of Braganza in 1662, but she had given him no child. However, he had begotten a number of illegitimate children by his mistresses. As he had no legitimate child, the crown was to pass to his brother, the Duke of York. While the Duke of York was a Roman Catholic, a large majority of the English population were Protestants who did not relish the idea of having a King of the opposite faith. There were two political parties in the picture. The Tories supported the King in his intention to decide the question of succession in favour of his brother, the Duke of York. But the Whigs were opposed to the claim of the Duke of York. They favoured the Duke of Monmouth, who was an illegitimate son of the King and a Protestant, as a claimant to the throne. The Earl of Shaftesbury was the principal leader of the Whig Party. The problem became more complicated when a certain individual by the name of Titus Oates declared that he had discovered a plot formed by the Roman Catholics to assassinate the King. This was the alleged Popish Plot, which was subsequently proved to be absolutely false.

Dryden's poem is based on these political events. The Popish Plot is referred to in Lines 108-115. Then there is the Temptation Scene (Lines 230-302 and Lines 376-476) in which the Earl of Shaftesbury is able to convince the Duke of Monmouth that he has a strong and valid claim to the throne. Shaftesbury skilfully employs flattery in order to tickle Monmouth's ego, and then goes on to arouse in him the ambition to become the King of England (this being an ambition which already vaguely existed in the Duke's mind). Lines 230-249 contain pure flattery, while the rest of Shaftesbury's speech contains an elaborate argument supporting Monmouth's claim to the throne. The first speech of Shaftesbury has its desired effect when Dryden says that even mighty minds can be influenced by praise, and that flattery soothes a person and ambition blinds him. However, the Duke of Monmouth seems to be somewhat uncertain and hesitant. Shaftesbury, finding that he has already partly produced the desired effect on the Duke's mind, continues his reasoning and is able to convince Monmouth about the soundness and justice of his point of view. Shaftesbury achieves a complete victory over the mind of Monmouth who cannot now resist Shaftesbury's suggestion. However, Dryden does not condemn Monmouth's decision in straight terms. He did not wish to offend Monmouth who was a favourite of the King. His criticism of Monmouth is mingled with kindliness, and he writes : "'Tis juster to lament him than accuse".

Dryden next speaks of the various political and religious groups that were ready to lend their support to Shaftesbury's designs.

Flattery soothes a person and ambition blinds him -

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Dryden refers to such groups as mal-contents and traitors. He calls them "mistaken men and patriots in their hearts, not wicked, but seduced by impious arts". These people became willing tools in the hands of Shaftesbury.

(Historical Personalities)

Dryden also gives us a portrayal of the historical personalities who were involved in the whole affair. Dealing first with the mal-contents, Dryden gives us a memorable portrait of the Earl of Shaftesbury to whom he gives the name of Achitophel. The Earl of Shaftesbury, according to Dryden, was the arch-conspirator. He is depicted as a man fit for close designs and crooked counsels, unfixed in principles, unpleased in power, false in friendship and relentless in hate. He was "resolved to ruin or to rule the State". He was a man of unlimited and reckless ambition. His genius was closely allied to madness. Nor does Dryden give us a one-sided picture of the character of Shaftesbury. He shows a certain degree of impartiality by taking notice of Shaftesbury's honesty and integrity as a judge. There is certainly some exaggeration in the description of the evil side of Shaftesbury but, on the whole, the portrait of Shaftesbury corresponds to historical facts.

The portrait of Zimri, or the Duke of Buckingham, is also vivid and memorable. Zimri is described as a man who seemed to be a combination of innumerable temperaments, a man who did not hold any opinion for a long time, a man who in the course of one single months was "chemist, fiddler, statesman and buffoon" a man who recklessly squandered his wealth. There is a close resemblance between Dryden's sketch of the Duke of Buckingham and the account of his character given by historians. This is, for instance, what the historian, Macaulay, has to say about the Duke of Buckingham : "As he had tried to amuse himself with architecture and music, with writing farces and with seeking for the philosophers' stone, so he now tried to amuse himself with a secret negotiation and a Dutch war. He had already, rather from fickleness and love of novelty than from any deep design, been faithless to every party."

Shimei, or Slingsby Bethel, is also drawn in accordance with historical facts. He is shown as a money-minded man seeking wealth by the most ready way which was "to cheat and pray". During his tenure of office (as the Sheriff of London) evil-doers had a free hand. The crowning stroke in the portrait of Shimei comes with the description of Shimei's extreme miserliness ; "His cooks with long disuse their trade forgot ;/Cool was his kitchen, though his brains were hot." Shimei held the laws of Moses to be all the more sacred because Moses had observed a prolonged fast before announcing those laws.

In the case of Corah, or Titus Oates, again, Dryden emphasises what are only the facts of history. It is now an accepted fact that Titus Oates was a trickster and liar and that the plot which he

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claimed to have discovered never existed. Dryden contemptuously refers to his low birth, calls him a "monument of brass" (thus pointing out his insolence and arrogance), ridicules his ruddy complexion, (because of which Oates could claim that a heavenly light played on his face), alludes to his bogus degree of Doctor of Divinity, and sternly rebukes him for being a conspirator and a false witness. No doubt this portrait shows much bitterness and venom on Dryden's part, but the villainy of Titus Oates is a historical fact and Dryden had the right to focus the attention of his readers on this villainy.

The character of the Duke of Monmouth has been rather leniently treated by Dryden, but there is no doubt that this Duke had a certain grace and a certain charm. Dryden describes him as beautiful and brave, and as fully aware of his position and status. And this is what Macaulay writes about the Duke: "His countenance was eminently handsome and engaging, his temper sweet, his manners polite and affable." Nor is there any exaggeration in Dryden's account of Monmouth's "progress" through the kingdom: "From east to west his glories he displays/And, like the sun, the promised land surveys". This is what Macaulay writes in this connection: "When he travelled, he was everywhere received with not less pomp, and with far more enthusiasm, than had been displayed when kings had made progresses through the realm."

So far as Dryden's treatment of the character of Charles II is concerned, it needs hardly to be pointed out that Dryden was writing as an ardent supporter and champion of the monarch. Charles II's weaknesses are well-known. He was a man of loose morals. He was very lavish in spending money. He begot several bastard children. He was dependent on Louis XIV, King of France, for financial help. Dryden takes due notice of Charles II's amours, but his treatment of this aspect of the King's character is witty and flippant so that we merely laugh at the King's conduct and do not feel very resentful. In any case, Dryden's portrayal of the King is partial, and not historically true. Shaftesbury and the Duke of Monmouth are closer to reality when they speak of the King. Both of them speak of Charles II's chronic financial stringency, and the Duke of Monmouth refers also to the King's love-affair with the Duchess of Portsmouth. Shaftesbury's speech describing the reception given to Charles II when, returning from his exile, he landed on Dover Beach, also corresponds to facts. The substance of the King's speech (Lines 939-1025) is historically authentic because this speech closely follows *His Majesty's Declaration Regarding the Dissolution of the Two Last Parliaments* (April, 1681), in which the King had made a successful appeal to the country by publishing his reasons for twice dissolving the Parliament.

The character-portraits also include brief sketches of some of the King's supporters. These are the sketches of Barzillai (the Duke of Ormonde), Barzillai's son (the Earl of Ossory, who met a premature death), Zadoc (William Sancroft, the Archbishop of Canter-

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bury), and a couple of others. These portraits are also historically true, on the whole. Here and there Dryden may have over-praised these individuals but that was natural and therefore excusable.

Dryden takes the King's side without any ambiguity. In Lines 759-810, he firmly puts forward the theory that a King, once appointed, cannot be deposed by the people. If the people were given the authority to remove their King, they would be tempted to act in an irrational and arbitrary manner. The people, says Dryden, should not disturb the foundations of the State and should not seek a revolution. Thus Dryden makes effective propaganda in favour of Charles II and in favour of monarchy. In doing so, Dryden wrote as a representative of all the Royalists in the country.

This poem is thus, on the whole, a true mirror to the times with which it deals. Dryden gives us a remarkably true picture of the temper, tendencies, and character of the English populace of the period. He especially dwells upon the fickleness and the grumbling nature of the English people. He calls them "a head-strong, moody, murmuring race" whom no King could govern and no God could please. The English people, says Dryden, were not satisfied with the large freedom they enjoyed but asked for even more freedom. They, in fact, wanted the kind of freedom that savages have in a state of nature. Dryden emphasises the changefulness and inconstancy of the English people and says that they had the habit of changing their monarch every twenty years.

(Religious Condition)

The religious conditions of the time are also truly reflected in the poem. We learn that the Protestants distrusted the Roman Catholics, and that the Roman Catholics suffered from many handicaps and injustices. Roman Catholics were regarded as God's enemies. They were deprived of all positions of privilege. They had to pay higher taxes, and they were made to suffer all kinds of ill treatment. Dryden condemns the clergymen, of both the Protestant and Roman Catholic faiths, for their insincerity and their monetary greed. These clergymen, he says, worshipped their deities, not from any genuine religious sentiment, but because they earned their living from this worship. This is a realistic picture of the clergymen of the time.

In conclusion we can say that Dryden has, in the main, adhered to actual historical facts in the writing of this poem. There is no twisting and no falsification of historical facts by him. There is no invention or fabrication of any kind in the poem. A certain degree of exaggeration (both in the denunciation of the King's enemies and in the praise of the loyalists) is certainly to be noticed. Some bias is certainly there, but that was implied in the very intention, in the very motive, and in the very purpose of the poem. On the whole, therefore, we can justly claim historical fidelity for this poem.

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Q. 4. "The pamphleteer in Dryden never gets the better of the artist." Discuss this with reference to *Absalom And Achitophel* (Part I).

Or

"In a political satire such as *Absalom And Achitophel*, there would have been for any other writer a danger of its becoming a mere party pamphlet but Dryden, when his imagination is fired, shows the true poetic faculty" Discuss.

Or

"To regard Dryden as pre-eminently a satirist is to ignore the fact that he was a poet." Discuss.

Or

"*Absalom And Achitophel* is only a political satire." Do you agree ? Give reasons for your answer.

Ans. The issue that has been raised in the above questions may first be clearly stated. *Absalom And Achitophel* is certainly a satire ; it is a political satire, that is, a satire that ridicules and brings into disrepute certain political personalities of the time. This political satire was written with a specific motive Having been written at the suggestion of the King himself, Dryden was to use his talents to lend the strongest possible support to the cause of the King and the Tory Party, and to undermine the cause of the Whig Party led by the Earl of Shaftesbury. As such, the poem had to be a kind of political pamphlet. The whole point, however, is that, although this poem is a political satire and a political pamphlet, it is at the same time a great work of art showing the high poetic qualities of Dryden. In this connection, we may quote the following words of a critic : "In one respect this poem (*Absalom And Achitophel*) stands alone in literature. A party pamphlet dedicated to the hour, it is yet immortal. No poem in our language is so inter-penetrated with contemporary allusion, with contemporary portraiture, with contemporary point ; yet no poem in our language has been more enjoyed by succeeding generations of readers. Scores of intelligent men who know by heart the characters of Zimri and Achitophel are content to remain in ignorance of the political careers of Buckingham and Shaftesbury. The speech in which Achitophel incites his faltering disciple (Monmouth) has been admired and recited by hundreds who have been blind to its historical fidelity and to its subtle personalities." This quotation refers to Dryden's memorable character portraits and the admirable Temptation Scene by virtue of which the poem rises above a mere party pamphlet and above a mere political satire. But, in addition to these two elements, the poem has other features also that raise its poetic status.

Here is another relevant critical opinion : "This poem is the triumph of genius as distinguished from mere talent. A party

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pamphlet in the hands of Regnier* or Churcill†,—a party pamphlet it would have remained, that and nothing more". That is to say, this party pamphlet is also an immortal poem which has not lost its appeal even today. Undoubtedly the poem is replete with political propaganda. The people of England are satirically depicted here as being changeful, giddy, inconstant, and disgruntled Not satisfied with any ruler for more than twenty years, they now wanted Charles II to be removed from the throne Not satisfied with the considerable freedom that they enjoyed, they wanted the freedom of savages in the state of nature. Of course, all the people were not so foolish as to hold such opinions. The sober part of the English population was free from such folly. It was only the 'factious crowd' who adopted an unreasonable and irrational attitude towards kingship The manner in which Dryden depicts the instability and fickleness of the factious crowd is quite amusing and is part of the political satire. The clergy of the time are also satirically depicted as hypocritical, selfish and mercenary. We are made to laugh at their failings and foibles also. Then, of course, there are the villains, the opponents of Charles II, whose satirical and condemnatory portraits are vividly depicted.

Apart from his political design of lowering certain political personages in the eyes of the readers, Dryden has written a long passage (lines 751-810) in which he speaks in favour of kingship and the *status quo*. Once a king has been appointed, says Dryden, he and his successors must be recognised as sovereign rulers. The monarch cannot be removed by the arbitrary will of the populace, because the judgment of the people is not always sound. It is very easy for a factious crowd to charge a king with being oppressive and tyrannical and thus try to depose him. Not only crowds but parliament itself may become infected with this 'public lunacy'. It is therefore binding on the people to obey their king once he has been installed, and it is not only binding on them but also on their descendants even though the descendants did not have any share in the installation of the king. We all have to suffer the penalty imposed upon our ancestor, Adam, even though we had no share in the fault that he committed. All political blunders cause damage to a State, but the most dangerous blunder is a revolution which leads to the dismissal of a king. Such is the argument that Dryden develops in this part of the poem. The argument seems foolish to us today, but it had much validity at the time this poem was written. We are living in times when a king no longer has any sanctity, when in fact no individual has any sanctity. This part of the poem, therefore, has no relevance today and has little appeal for us.

The King's speech, with which the poem concludes, is also part of the political propaganda which forms the basis of the poem,

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* Mathurin Regnier (1573—1613), a French satirist.

† Charles Churchill (1731—1764), an English writer of political and social satires.

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and this speech too has become out of date today. The King says that he is entitled to rule on the strength of the law which constitutes the foundation of the State. The people, he argues, have no right to depose the ruling monarch. Even God cannot grant to the people all that they desire. Much less can a King do so. Decisions cannot be taken by the vote of the people. His gentleness and kindness, says the King, have been misinterpreted as weakness and timidity. He claims to have the power to defeat the rebels towards whom he has so far been lenient and forgiving. The King's arguments, too, are meaningless today but, as propaganda in Dryden's own time, they were quite effective.

As has been said, it is not the political propaganda in the poem that gives it permanence One element that lends a perennial interest to the poem is Dryden's characterisation of a number of historical personalities with all his pungency of wit and satire. This characterisation still interests and entertains us. And there are other artistic qualities which show that Dryden was genuinely inspired when he wrote this poem. These qualities include the aptness and felicity of word and phrase, the satirical thrusts and the laughter which they arouse, the biblical parallels, and the generalisations regarding human nature which lend to the poem both depth and weight.

Much of the English reader's enjoyment of the poem springs from an easy recognition of the historical personalities behind the biblical masks. (This is true also of the Indian reader who has an adequate knowledge of English history and of the Bible.) Dryden's use of the biblical allegory enables him to show that what had happened in ancient times could happen again. In other words, a part of Dryden's purpose was to point out that history repeats itself (and this is a universal truth). The frequent biblical allusions also give the poem depth and perspective. Then there are a number of Miltonic allusions which link this poem with *Paradise Lost*. By this association with Milton's great epic, Dryden's poem gains not only in stature but in conviction and authority. The very temptation scene in Dryden's poem is closely linked with the temptation scene in *Paradise Lost*. Dryden's poem also contains a number of echoes from Shakespeare (from *Julius Caesar*, *Troilus And Cressida*, and *The Merchant of Venice*). The links with Milton and Shakespeare are ingredients contributing to the universal character of the poem.

The portraits of character have a universal quality in so far as we recognise in them certain features that are to be found in politicians of all times and of climes. The portrait of Achitophel is the most powerful. Achitophel is depicted as essentially evil, violent and changeable. He is never happy in times of peace. He is the kind of man who welcomes a perpetual crisis in his country. His ambition knows no bounds. He is restless and unfixed in principles. He is 'resolved to ruin or to rule the State'. If we survey the Indian political scene today, we shall find not one Achito-

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phel but several of them actively pursuing their selfish designs at the cost of the nation. There is doubtless a certain universality about this portrait. The irony of the whole situation is that persons of this kind pose to be patriots, as Achitophel (Shaftesbury) did.

The portrait of Zimri perhaps shows Dryden's satirical powers at their best. Dryden's gifts of irony and sarcasm are nowhere employed with better effect than here. Zimri, we are told, was so "various" that he seemed to be not one, but all mankind's epitome. He constantly changed his ideas as also his hobbies and occupations. In the course of one single month, he showed himself by turns as an alchemist, a fiddler, a statesman, and a buffoon. He also showed a great interest in women, painting, rhyming, and drinking. He had a peculiar aptitude for squandering wealth. Even fools could rob him of money. The portrait of Zimri is an excellent example of Dryden's talent for raillery. This, too, is an unforgettable portrait because it shows a splendid skill in writing satirical poetry. Indeed, this sketch is a masterpiece of satirical poetry. Politics does not have much to do with the satirical skill that is shown here.

Then there are the portraits of Shimei (Slingsby Bethel) and Corah (Titus Oates). In these two portraits also there are certain features that are universal. One such feature is Shimei's mercenary greed. Shimei accumulated wealth by the most ready way, which was to cheat and pray. In his hand he held the wand of justice, but his neck was "loaded with a chain of gold". His kitchen was always cold, and he fed his servants with spiritual food The miserly, stingy person is well-known in comic literature. Miserliness is one of the traits of that unforgettable Shakespearean character, Shylock. Corah is depicted as "monumental brass" with reference to his extreme arrogance and haughtiness. This weaver's son thought that his humble birth could not prevent him from performing great deeds, and so he invented the Popish Plot. The author mocks at Corah's sunken eyes, harsh voice, long chin, and ruddy complexion. We get here a merciless exposure of a false, scheming, fraudulent, and hypocritical man. And there is no dearth of such men in any country. It is this that lends universality to this portrait also.

In short, we have some splendid satire in the portraits of the various historical personalities, but this satire can be enjoyed even without much knowledge of the historical conditions which prevailed in Dryden's time. Thus when we say that *Absalom and Achitophel* is a great political satire, we are not emphasising the word "political" as much as the word "satire". All great satire has an enduring, permanent quality. And *Absalom And Achitophel* certainly possesses this quality. Neither the political background nor the political personalities are unimportant in the poem, but the poem has its excellences and merits as "poetry", and these excellences and merits include the satirical skill with which Dryden has sketched the various characters. The manner in which Dryden drops to rough

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physical description in giving us the portrait of Corah is strikingly reminiscent of Chaucer himself. In Achitophel Dryden has created a character who survives by the sheer precision of the language, the energy and the capability of words.

Nor can we lose sight of Dryden's rhetoric as shown in Achitophel's dazzling arguments in the Temptation Scene, and as shown also in the eloquent and inspired speech of the King at the end of the poem. Dryden's generalisations regarding human nature are also memorable and retain their appeal even to-day. The portrait of Achitophel alone contains five aphorisms, a couple of which may be quoted here.

> Great wits are sure to madness near allied,
> And thin partitions do their bounds divide. (*Lines 163-4*)
>
> So easy still it proves in factious times
> With public zeal to cancel private crimes. (*Lines 180-81*)

There are other generalisations scattered in the poem. One such generalisation pertains to the clergy: "For priests of all religions are the same" after which Dryden points out that all priests are mercenary and are merely concerned with their own livelihood. Another quotable line is: "Fools are more hard to conquer than persuade". The following lines are also worth quoting here:

> Nor is the people's judgment always true:
> The most may err as grossly as the few.

The style of this poem illustrates both Dryden's classicism and his romanticism. There is in its style a just accuracy and a guarded fitness. The inventive genius of the writer brings about an alliance of words and ideas in which brilliancy and novelty harmonize with the demands of taste. But all the warmth, all the imaginative ardour remains; it acts as an animating force within the expression itself, lending it energy, vividness, and vitality. Condensed in brief evocations, in sober, striking images, the power of poetic suggestion is here to be found in its fullness, in no way hindered by an exercise of the writer's critical judgment. The style of Dryden through much of this poem is, above all, an inspired style. Its purity, its firmness, and its lustre are a result of the union of spontaneity with artistic skill. And this brilliance of style is to be found not only in the arguments put forth by Achitophel and in Absalom's reply, not only in the portraits of the King's enemies, but also in the character-sketches of the King's supporters.

Q. 5. *Absalom and Achitophel* **is organised around a contrast between two ways of life. Extravagance, restlessness, ambition, pride, and intolerance are contrasted with moderation, order, tolerance, patience, and humility." Elaborate this statement through an analysis of the text.**

Ans. The contrast between the two ways of life described in the question above is distinctly to be found in *Absalom And*

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Achitophel. This contrast appears most markedly and emphatically in the two sets of character-portraits—the portraits of the malcontents, and the portraits of the loyalists The malecontents include Achitophel (the Earl of Shaftesbury), Zimri (the Duke of Buckingham), Absalom (the Duke of Monmouth), Shimei (Slingsby Bethel), and Corah (Titus Oates). These characters represent various human faults and defects specified in the Question above. Take Achitophel first. Dryden's attack on this man is a moral attack. Achitophel is essentially evil, violent and changeable. He is a rebel who "stood at bold defiance with his prince". He is intolerant of the King's position and authority. He is "restless", "unfixed in principles and place", "in power unpleased", "impatient of disgrace" He is "a fiery soul", unfit for times of peace and tranquillity. He is false in friendship, and relentless in hate. He is the kind of man who would like to rule the State and, failing to get that position, would not mind ruining it. He is so restless and ambitious that he refuses to himself "the needful hours of rest" even in his old age. In this way he punishes his body "which he could not please".

Then there is Zimri who wastes his energies in a frenzy of interests—politics, chemistry, writing, sexual intrigue. He squanders his wealth, and energy in the vain pursuit of pleasure. He knows no moderation : "Railing and praising were his usual themes,/And both, to show his judgment, in extremes". He is over-violent or over-civil, so that every man in his eyes is either a god or a devil. Extravagance is one of his chief defects : "In squandering wealth was his peculiar art".

Absalom's ambition knows no bounds when once his desire to wield power is aroused by Achitophel's skilful talk. We are told that Absalom is an "ambitious youth, too covetous of fame". He has too much of Lucifer's pride in his nature. He is therefore readily led away from the right path. Why should his illegitimate birth diminish his importance ? he asks. He feels that his soul is made to rule an empire. He argues that, even if the desire to attain a high position is a sin, this sin has a divine character.

Shimei is depicted as possessing a hypocritical zeal towards God and a real hatred towards his King. This man employs all possible tricks to do damage to the King. He has an immoderate love of money so that he never violates the sanctity of the Sabbath except when he can make some money by doing so. He accumulates wealth by the easiest known method, namely by cheating and covering up such activity by a show of piety. During his tenure of office (as the Sheriff of London), treachery towards the King is regarded as something normal. He is an extremely stingy man. No fires burn in his kitchen, though fires of hatred for the King do burn in his brain.

Another man who is restless, ambitious, proud and intolerant, is Corah. Corah is, indeed, a target of withering contempt and

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personal abuse in this poem. He is described as "monumental brass", because of his shameless impudence, pride and arrogance. The son of a weaver, he tries to exalt himself by coming into prominence through his fabrication of the non-existent Popish Plot. He claims divine inspiration. He pretends to have such an ardent religious zeal that he feels that he has the right to heap insults on his sovereign. In bringing the King into disrepute, he goes to the extreme. He thinks that he has a licence to say whatever he wants to say and to do whatever he feels like doing, no matter how guilty his words and deeds might be. He contrives the murder of Sir Edmund Godfrey.

Nor should we forget the English people in general Among them are persons who want to sell their services for financial gain. They think that kingship is a needless and heavy burden on the State. They are bold in their treachery towards the King. They shudder with fear to recall the violence committed by Cromwell, but they are arrogant towards Charles who had lawfully been made the King. These people are led by hot-headed priests who wish to restore the Commonwealth in which the parliament and the clergymen had ruled the nation in a despotic manner. These priests belong to the category of persons "who think too little and who talk too much", and who are out to build nothing but destroy all things.

As we go through Dryden's sketches of the persons named above, we are filled with loathing, disgust, and a feeling of nausea. It is a revolting and outrageous picture that Dryden brings before our eyes. We are certainly amused by Dryden's brilliant wit, but the wit of Dryden cannot nullify the gloom and the horror of the evil pervading the life of the nobles as well as the common people. We feel relieved only when a contrasted picture is presented to us. The brief sketches of the characters of the loyalists restore our faith in human nature. The loyalists possess some of the best human qualities including moderation, order, tolerance, patience and humility. There is Barzillai (the Duke of Ormonde), for instance. This man has shared the sufferings of his King in the latter's years of exile. He frequents the court, but he does not practise the crooked arts of a courtier. He is generous without being wasteful. His eldest son, the Earl of Ossory, also possesses a nobility of character. Like his father, the Earl of Ossory is a loyal subject who wins many distinctions by virtue of his bravery and his sense of honour. He is depicted as a man of rare qualities, whose premature death deeply grieves the heart of Dryden.

Then there is Zadoc (William Sancroft, the Archbishop of Canterbury), who avoids power and position because of his modesty, and who has won the favour of the King by his humility. There is the Earl of Mulgrave, a man of keen and penetrating judgment, who shows his loyalty to the King in the course of parliamentary debates but who is by no means a slavish supporter of the government. Jotham (George Savile) is a man of fertile brain, with a

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capacity to influence and sway the audiences. There is Hushai (Laurence Hyde), Charles's friend in distress, possessing an enormous diplomatic expertise, who as First Lord of the Treasury exercises great moderation in public expenditure. Another worthy man is Amiel (Edward Seymour), a nobleman by birth but nobler still by virtue of his abilities which he has shown in his capacity as the Speaker of parliament. After his retirement, the Speakers who follow him are men of a rash nature, so that his steadiness acquires a greater value by contrast with the unrestrained conduct of his successors.

King Charles II in his speech also claims to possess the qualities of tolerance, patience and humility. He speaks of his "native mercy", his "clemency", and his "tenderness of blood". But it is doubtful if Charles II possessed any of these qualities. Dryden, who wrote this poem as a kind of propaganda for his patron (King Charles II), had no other alternative but to depict the King in a favourable light. The King was certainly a tolerant man so far as his religious views were concerned. He was also opposed to vindictive action. But his secret Treaty of Dover with the French King (in 1670) and his tendency to absolutism, which showed itself in his frequent prorogations of parliament, go against him. In spite of this, the King's speech has its share in reinforcing our impression of human goodness as contrasted with the human evil represented by the mal-contents and the rebels.

Q. 6. "I have but laughed at some men's follies, when I could have declaimed against their vices, and other men's virtues I have commended as freely as I have taxed their crimes." Consider the characters in *Absalom And Achitophel* in the light of this claim made by Dryden.

Or

"Dryden's wit is essentially good-humoured. This is both its weakness and strength." How far do you agree? Discuss with reference to *Absalom And Achitophel*.

Or

Is "the amendment of vices by correction" the essence of satire? How far is this true of *Absalom And Achitophel*?

Or

Write a note on Dryden as a satirist in the light of his poem, *Absalom And Achitophel*. (Or, Discuss *Absalom And Achitophel* as a satire.)

Ans. *Absalom And Achitophel* is part history and propaganda, part satire, part eulogy. Thus this poem is satirical in the mixed tradition. The complexity of its form and art is pointed out in Dr. Johnson's comment: "If it be considered as a poem political and controversial, it will be found to comprise all the excellences of

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which the subject is susceptible : acrimony of censure, elegance of praise, artful delineation of characters, variety and vigour of sentiment, happy turns of language, and pleasing harmony of numbers ; and all these raised to such a height as can scarcely be found in any other English composition."

Satire appears in a variety of forms. Invective, offensive vituperation, didactic instruction, corrective ridicule, personal abuse, pessimistic generalisations, mild scorn, amused raillery, genial or sharp parody, slapstick humour, gross vulgarity, ironic wit—all these and several other features are to be found in different satirical works. "The true end of satire is the amendment of vices by correction", says Dryden There is a general agreement that satire is a "criticism of life", and that it seeks to destroy by ridicule what is obnoxious, and, implicitly, to uphold certain moral values.

Satire certainly aims at correcting, reforming, and improving individuals who are guilty of follies, absurdities, and crimes. But in *Absalom And Achitophel*, Dryden's principal object was to defend and justify the King and the King's policies, and to discredit and to bring into disrepute the opponents of the King. The victims of his attack in this poem were seasoned and hardened politicians, and Dryden could not have hoped to reform such persons by his attack. His chief motive was to expose their dishonesty, hypocrisy and treachery.

The chief weapons that Dryden chose for attacking the King's opponents were those that are generally employed by a satirist—namely, wit, humour, irony, sarcasm, raillery. As he says, he wanted to laugh at some men's follies. He certainly makes us laugh at certain follies of some of his victims. But it cannot be said that his attacks on various individuals are merely a kind of ridicule and mockery. In certain cases, he becomes intensely scornful, contemptuous, abusive and vituperative. His wit is genial and good-humoured but not always. His wit often becomes sharp, pungent and extremely offensive. When a satirist becomes genuinely indignant at the vices and evils around him, he cannot remain good-humoured for long. His wrath and ire are bound sometimes to have the better of him It is for this reason that Dryden's portrait of the Earl of Shaftesbury has little humour or wit. It is mostly a serious attack. Likewise there is tremendous bitterness and fierce hatred in his portrait of Titus Oates. He certainly laughs, and makes us laugh uproariously, by his mockery of the Duke of Buckingham and his sarcastic references to Slingsby Bethel. On the whole, Dryden's portrayal of the various characters is historically true. The poem begins in a witty manner. Dryden ironically and skilfully exposes the sexual promiscuity of the King, taking care at the same time to make the exposure entertaining rather than offensive to the victim. We get the feeling that the King himself could have spoken about his licentious life in the manner in which Dryden refers to it. In order to excuse the King's immorality, Dryden wittily sets his story at a time "before polygamy was made

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a sin", when "man on many multiplied his kind", and when it was commendable for a King to keep concubines and "scatter his Maker's image throughout the land".

Of the King's numerous bastards, Absalom was the bravest and the most handsome. Absalom's war-like deeds are mentioned, and his faults too are indicated. Then the English people, rebellious by nature, are satirised : "The Jews, a headstrong, moody, 'murmuring race ....." A reference is made to their fickleness of temper. They were the kind of people who wanted to change their King every twenty years.

Several political personalities are the victims of Dryden's merciless satire. Shaftesbury is depicted as a cunning schemer and an unscrupulous intriguer. He is shown as a man without principles and a man whose lust for power was unlimited. He had a stormy mind in a pigmy body. He was never happy in times of peace and stability. False in friendship, merciless in his enmities, he wanted to rule the country or to ruin it. Dryden's attack becomes even more forceful when he points out that Shaftesbury could justly be called a madman. "Great wits are sure to madness near allied/And thin partitions do their bounds divide". But perhaps the most biting lines are those where we are told that Shaftesbury's son was conceived at a moment when "his soul did huddled notions try". It may be pointed out that the element of abuse in Dryden's sketch of Shaftesbury is more marked than the vein of humour or ridicule. Dryden is a master of contempt and this passage illustrates it. "A name to all succeeding ages cursed" ; "For close designs and crooked counsels fit" ; "unfixed in principles and place"—such lines are full of abuse and contempt, and have very little humour.

However, Dryden pays a tribute to Shaftesbury's magisterial qualities. By praising Shaftesbury's honesty and integrity as a judge, Dryden makes good his claim that he has commended men's virtues as freely as he has taxed their crimes. Perhaps, also, Dryden wishes to seem impartial so that his condemnation of Shaftesbury may become more credible. Some praise of the villain can serve as part of the rhetoric of persuasion. Besides, a certain amount of praise is sometimes called for as part of the satirical convention, because praise emphasises the undesirable features of the person who is the target of satire. Dryden's art as a satirist is, indeed, noteworthy here. Although guilty of wickedness and villainy, Shaftesbury has been depicted as being intellectually gifted. The portrait of a wicked man who is gifted suggests that this man was also a fool. His wisdom turned to folly in his restless, impatient, daring temper, and in the madness to which his great wit was allied when he overtaxed his weak body. After praising Shaftesbury's qualities as a judge, Dryden again criticises him by saying that, in the game of politics, he was a reckless gambler : "But wild ambition loves to slide, not stand....."

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Dryden's portrait of Zimri (the Duke of Buckingham) is characterised by plenty of good humour and geniality. Here Dryden really laughs at his victim's follies when he could have declaimed against his vices. Zimri, we are told, was so "various" that he seemed to be not one individual but all mankind's epitome. He was so changeful that, in the course of one single month, he showed himself by turns as an alchemist, a fiddler, a statesman and a buffoon. He was a trifler who showed much interest in women, painting, rhyming and drinking. In his praise of some and his condemnation of others, he went to the extremes. His folly was seen also in the way he squandered his wealth. Even fools could rob him of money. There is no abuse in this satirical sketch. Zimri is depicted more as a fool than as a knave.

Dryden then goes on to attack such persons as Hastings, Grey, Howard, and Jones, with the multitude ("the rascal rebel") thrown in. In mentioning such persons, Dryden refers to their dullness, talkativeness, lechery and hypocrisy. Here, again, we have more of contempt than of wit or humour. We cannot say that Dryden is here laughing at the follies of his victims, and not declaiming against their vices.

We then meet Shimei (Slingsby Bethel). The lines dealing with this individual make a brilliant use of the satiric possibilities of the heroic couplet for anti-climax and clash of opposites. Through a series of anti-climaxes the man is depicted as odious. His zeal, wisdom, and piety are ironically mentioned to convey his hatred, cunning and blasphemy. He was one of those men who accumulated wealth by the most ready way which is "to cheat and pray". In his hand he held the wand of justice (because he was the Sheriff), but his neck was loaded with a chain of gold. He was always to be found in the midst of those who were heard cursing and denouncing the King. His greed and his miserliness are conveyed to us in a witty manner : "His cooks with long disuse their trade forgot :/Cool was his kitchen, though his brains were hot." We are greatly amused when we are told that he respected Moses because Moses had observed a prolonged fast. There is plenty of wit in this portrait. This is a portrait in which Dryden partly declaims against the vices of his victim and partly laughs at his follies. It is not pure laughter that we get here. It was inevitable for Dryden to use insulting language for this man.

But even more scornful and contemptuous is Dryden's sketch of Corah (Titus Oates). Corah is depicted as a confirmed liar. In telling lies, Corah became prophetic, saw visions, and was so carried away in spirit as to imagine that he had obtained a doctor's degree. We here get a bitter attack on the falsity of Corah, both as witness and inspired prophet. Corah's religious zeal not only instigated hostility against the King but gave him the right to manipulate a murder (the murder of Sir Edmund Godfrey). The portrait of Corah, though not witty like that of Zimri, does amuse us at places.

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We are especially amused by the lines about Corah's low birth, his physical appearance including his ruddy complexion, his claim to a foreign degree, etc. But we get a merciless exposure of a false, scheming, fraudulent and hypocritical man. Corah has been portrayed as the most hateful in a large crowd of fools and scoundrels.

Dryden ridicules the English people also. He mocks at their fickle-mindedness and perpetual discontent. He calls them a "head-strong, moody, murmuring race", who could not be governed by any King and who could not be pleased even by God. In spite of the large freedom they enjoyed, they demanded yet more freedom, seeking the freedom which savages enjoy in a state of nature. They had made Charles II the King, and now they wanted to remove him from the throne. These people rebelled against their monarch without much cause because they were governed by the moon which keeps changing (in shape). All this is pungent satire. Here the element of wit is considerable. Here we would not be wrong in saying that Dryden laughs at the follies of his victims, and does not declaim against their vices.

The priests and clergymen also get their share of ridicule. They are depicted as self-seeking, mercenary and hypocritical. Priests of all religions, says Dryden, are the same. In the defence of their gods, the priests will go to any length. After all, priests must stand by the cause which is the source of livelihood for them. There is plenty of mockery and fun in the lines dealing with this class of people. We enjoy the fun all the more because our own experience of the so-called hermits, ascetics, and *sadhus* fully confirms what Dryden has to say about the clergymen.

This survey shows the superb quality of Dryden's satire. At certain places, Dryden's satire is serious and grim with very little humour : at certain places, it is very witty and boisterously funny ; at certain places the wit is mingled with contempt and hatred ; at certain places it is abusive and vituperative. Dryden is no doubt genial in his treatment of his victims, but he is also merciless, relentless, and even fierce in attacking some of them. His satirical passages in this poem can therefore not be brought under one single formula. His satire appears in various forms and shapes, and shows several different qualities. But the total impression that this poem, *Absalom And Achitophel*, produces is that its author was a great satirical genius. This poem is a political satire, written with a specific object which was to denigrate the Whigs and the Whig leaders, and to eulogise the King and the King's supporters. It was also one of Dryden's motives to defend monarchy as an institution. In these tasks, Dryden succeeded eminently. He has really been able the convey to us the political discontent and turmoil of the times, the disgruntlement of the Whigs led by the Earl of Shaftesbury, the tussle between the King and Shaftesbury with regard to the succession to the crown, and the temper of the people at large.

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Allowing for the exaggeration which is an inevitable feature of a satire, Dryden's portraits of character are remarkable because of his satirical thrusts and the moral enthusiasm that inspires them. This satire is certainly a political pamphlet, but at the same time it is a great work of art showing Dryden's poetic capabilities, including his expert handling of the heroic couplet.

Q. 7. "The men Dryden deals with are always men persons we can recognise today in our own experience, and the hatred he expresses rises obviously from enthusiasm for what is noble and right, and not from personal malice." Do you agree? Discuss with reference to *Absalom And Achitophel*.

Ans. *Absalom And Achitophel* contains several character-sketches that have become famous. Indeed, this poem has been called a 'gallery of portraits. One of the elements that lend a permanent interest to this poem is Dryden's characterisation of a number of historical personalities. In this characterisation we taste all the pungency and sharpness of Dryden's wit and satire.

The question that we have to deal with is two-fold : (*i*) whether the persons with whom Dryden has dealt in his poem are such as we can recognise today in our own experience, and (*ii*) whether Dryden's hatred for some of the characters has its source in moral enthusiasm and not in personal malice.

There is no doubt that several features in the portrayal of various characters in this poem have a universal appeal because such features have been found in certain individuals at all times and in all climes. As we go through the various character-sketches, we get the pleasure that is derived from our recognition of similar persons within our knowledge, if not within the circle of our personal acquaintances. Each character-sketch is surely the portrait of a particular individual who actually lived in the times to which the poem relates. But each portrait contains also certain features that belong to persons whom we have known or we have heard about in our own time. Of course, it is only in a limited sense that the characters in this poem correspond to persons we have heard about in our own times or we have actually known personally. No portrait in the poem would fully or completely fit any other person we have known. A complete identification between any of the portraits and any individual we have known is impossible. It is only with regard to certain particular features in a portrait or with regard to the over-all impression which a portrait produces that we can make the claim that has been made in the Question above.

Take, first, the case of the portrait of Achitophel (the Earl of Shaftesbury). This man is depicted as a cunning schemer and an unscrupulous intriguer. He is shown as being devoid of any principles and having an unlimited lust for power. While he had the guts to face a crisis or a danger, he was utterly unfit for times of peace

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and tranquillity. He denied to himself the needful rest in his old age in order to pursue his wrongful political activities. He was false in friendship and merciless in his enmities. He wanted to rule the country and, failing in this object, he was prepared to ruin the nation. He violated the Triple Alliance, and tried to hide his political misdeeds under the cloak of patriotism. But he had one redeeming feature. As a judge, he was honest, conscientious and incorruptible. Intellectually he was a man of an exceptional calibre.

Persons of the kind of the Earl of Shaftesbury as depicted by Dryden are not commonly found in any country. We do not readily exclaim that we have known or heard about several similar persons within our own experience. But we do exclaim that we recognise some of the traits of this character as belonging to certain other persons whom we either know personally or whom we know by their reputation. There are hundreds of Congressmen in our country who indulge in all kinds of political intrigue to further their own ends and to promote their own ambitions. There are thousands of men in every country who have no principles but whose ambition is boundless. There are numerous people who hide their political misdeeds under the cloak of patriotism. But we are hardly able to think of anybody whose character corresponds in full to Dryden's portrait of the Earl of Shaftesbury. There are, indeed, few persons who combine Shaftesbury's moral bankruptcy with his intellectual genius and his magisterial impartiality. This combination is certainly unique. Thus we cannot say in an off-hand, casual manner that we are familiar with many Achitophels or Shaftesburys. Nor do the circumstances prevailing in those times correspond to circumstances prevailing in these times anywhere in the world because, in the first place, there are hardly any kings left in the world and, secondly, because, no matter how much history may repeat itself, no two sets of political circumstances are ever identical. Thus the Earl of Shaftesbury cannot be taken out of the context in which he lived and transplanted in the present-day context. Yet the fact remains that many of the defects from which Shaftesbury suffers—lack of principle, lust for power, hypocrisy, treachery, etc —are found in abundance among politicians of every land.

Then there is the portrait of Zimri (the Duke of Buckingham). Zimri, we are told, was so "various" that he seemed to be not one individual, but all mankind's epitome. He constantly changed his opinions, his ideas, his hobbies and his occupations. In the course of one single month he showed himself by turns as an alchemist, a fiddler, a statesman and a buffoon. He showed also much interest in women, painting, rhyming and drinking. His usual subjects of conversation were praising some people and condemning others, and in both these he went to the extremes. He had a peculiar aptitude for squandering wealth. Even fools could rob him of his money. Having annoyed the King, he tried to compensate himself

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by forming parties, but he could never become the leader of any party.

This portrait, too, does not fit many people within our knowledge in its entirety. But several features of this portrait are easily recognised by us as belonging to several persons within our own circle of acquaintances. Almost everyone must have known somebody who changes his ideas and opinions frequently. Familiar is the case of persons who are one thing at one time and something else at another time, that is, persons who show a variety of interests one after the other, being unable to stick to any particular pursuit. An interest in such different fields as women, painting, rhyming and drinking is also not uncommon. Praising and condemning others and going to the extremes in both is also nothing unusual. And, of course, we have all witnessed the familiar spectacle of a rich young man squandering his wealth and being robbed of his money by all sorts of people. In other words, Dryden's picture of a man's variety of interests, his instability, his superficiality, his folly, his contradictions, and his futility is certainly a realistic picture. There is not doubt some exaggeration in the account of Zimri's ten thousand freakish thoughts, his hourly search for what is new, in his contradictory pursuit of opposites, in his violent rushing to all extremes, in the squandering of his wealth, in his silly jokes, and in his forming parties or factions whom he could not control ; but in its essentials this picture corresponds to human characteristics as we know them from our own experience of life.

Shimei (Slingsby Bethel) is also one of the characters in this poem. The principal traits of this character are hatred towards the King, cunning, monetary greed, miserliness and blasphemy. This man never broke the Sabbath, but for gain. He never uttered an oath or a curse, unless it was against the King. He accumulated wealth by the most convenient method, which was "to cheat and pray". He was so miserly that his cooks, not having been made use of for a long time, had forgotten their skill. His kitchen was always cold, and he fed his servants with spiritual diet. This kind of character is surely familiar to us. Persons of this kind are to be found in large numbers everywhere. Then there is Corah (Titus Oates) who invented the Popish Plot. Corah was a great liar and a false witness. His religious zeal was of the inverted kind as it not only inspired hostility against the King but permitted him to instigate the murder of Sir Edmund Godfrey. He was the son of a weaver but, says the author ironically, great actions may be performed as well by the son of a weaver as by the son of a King. He is described as "monumental brass", possibly with reference to his extreme haughtiness, possibly with reference to his stupidity. Corah has been depicted as the most odious and hateful in a large crowd of fools and scoundrels. Nor is there any dearth of such men in this world. This man's falseness, his scheming and fraudulent nature, and his hypocrisy, are commonly to be found Corah's physical characteristics are, of course, his own. He had sunken

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eyes, a harsh voice, a long chin and a ruddy complexion. This combination of physical features may be unusual ; but so far as the nature and the mentality of this man are concerned, these are to be met with everywhere.

Absalom (the Duke of Monmouth) is also among the malcontents. Dryden praises Absalom as a likable young man but gives us a clear glimpse of his rashness, ambition and hypocrisy through his speeches. Absalom allows himself to be manipulated by Achitophel and, in turn, tries to play upon the feelings of the crowd. The character of Absalom too is not very unusual. History is replete with persons of this type and, if we exclude his ambition to attain the throne, such persons are easy to locate in any society. The combination of a handsome appearance with hypocrisy, polish with pretence, bravery with recklessness or rashness, high-breeding with ingratitude, is fairly common.

Then there are a few minor characters. They include Balaam (the Earl of Huntingdon) who was "well-hung."* Caleb (Lord Grey) who was callous and contemptible, Nadab (Lord Howard) who "made new porridge for the paschal lamb". They cannot be regarded as rare specimens because there are plenty of such persons everywhere. There is also the "rascal rabble" or the ungrateful multitude. The multitude as depicted by Dryden is the mob or the common populace notorious for its fickle-mindedness, its inconstancy, its unreliability, and so on.

Dryden's hatred for the mal-contents in this poem does not have a personal basis. There are two reasons for this hatred. One is that Dryden wrote this poem to please the King. His political motive in writing the poem was to bring the King's enemies into disrepute, and in this object he achieved conspicuous success. And the second reason, which is a much stronger reason, was that Dryden valued what was noble and right and could not, therefore, reconcile himself to the evil features of these individuals. Dryden's attack on these historical personalities—the Earl of Shaftesbury, the Duke of Buckingham, Slingsby Bethel, and Titus Oates—was essentially a moral attack. Treachery, false professions of patriotism, hypocrisy, ingratitude, greed and avarice, fickleness of disposition, betrayal of trust, are vices which no noble-minded person can tolerate. Once Dryden had made up his mind to write a propaganda poem, he became genuinely indignant and furious at the vices and crimes of the persons who were playing a leading role in the politics of the time and whose misdeeds aroused his ire. He himself declared that the object of his satire was to bring about "the amendment of vices by correction." A satirist ridicules vices and evils with the object of discouraging people from taking to immoral courses. Every true satirist is prompted to attack vices and evils by a genuine moral enthusiasm. Dryden could not have created this immortal gallery

* This phrase is used to mean (*i*) fluent in speech and (*ii*) sexually potent. There is a pun on the phrase.

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of satirical portraits in his poem without such moral enthusiasm. The very fact that the portraits drawn by him carry conviction with us is proof of his sincere moral ardour. And these portraits carry conviction partly because our historical knowledge serves to corroborate Dryden's portrayal of the personalities involved and partly because of the felicity of word and phrase which could not have been achieved by the author if there did not exist a genuine moral fervour in his mind. This does not mean that Dryden was not capable of personal malice. He has shown his personal malice in his poem *MacFlecknoe* which is a satirical attack on Shadwell. But Dryden's attack on the political personalities in *Absalom And Achitophel* did not originate in personal malice ; nor did the attack gain in force and weight by any such feeling. If he had not been commissioned by the King to write this poem, he would not of his own accord have launched an attack on these political figures. We must, therefore, recognise the fact that Dryden wrote this poem mainly in the service of the King although he also used this opportunity to give a free and uninhibited expression to his high reverence for moral principles.

Q. 8. Is it true that in *Absalom And Achitophel* Dryden raised political satire from its usual plane of coarseness to epical grandeur ? Elucidate.

Or

"*Absalom And Achitophel* is a little epic, containing also humorous and satiric elements." Discuss.

Or

"What gives *Absalom And Achitophel* its characteristic tone is the blending with a heroic basis of a strong element of wit." Discuss this statement.

Or

"No satire in English is at once so weighty, and gives such an impression of the satirist's superiority to his victims." Examine this observation in regard to Dryden's *Absalom And Achitophel*.

Ans. *Absalom And Achitophel* began a new chapter in the history of English classical satire. English satire had passed successively through the hands of Gascoigne, Donne, Lodge, Hall, Marston, Wither, Cleveland, Marvell and Oldham. But it had never attained an excellence comparable to what was attained by Dryden in *Absalom And Achitoph l* This poem raised English satire to the level of that superb satirical literature which Quintilian claimed as the peculiar and exclusive product of the Roman genius. Satire in this poem is cast in the epic mould. This important feature was suggested no doubt by the Fourth Satire of Juvenal. Horase

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and Lucan undoubtedly supplied models for the elaborate character-portrayals. Lucan's description of the political conditions of Rome at the time of the great civil conflict is the model for Dryden's picture of the state of political parties in London. Nor was the device of disguising living persons and current incidents under the veil of Scriptural names new to Dryden's readers.

Dryden described *Absalom And Achitophel* simply as "A Poem". But a critic has appropriately called it a "witty, heroic poem". It was written for the purpose of exciting public feeling against Lord Shaftesbury, leader of the Whig Party, who was trying to exclude the Catholic Duke of York from the succession, and to put the King's illegitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth, on the throne. Dryden wrote the poem at the suggestion of the King himself. The poem is characterised by great polish and splendour, and yet the satire is appalling and tremendous. It excites our anger against its victims, not only on account of their follies and faults, but also on account of their being assailed by so splendid a weapon. We forget the offenders in the awfulness and majesty of the power by which they are crushed "Instead of shrinking at the horror of the carnage, we are lost in admiration at the brilliancy of the victory. Like the lightning of heaven, the satire of Dryden throws a splendour around the objects which it destroys." At times the violence of his tone is equal to that of his contemporaries like John Oldham. Like Oldham, he knew how to hate strongly. But Dryden's mastery of expression allowed him in any case a careful attention to form ; and the fire of his inspiration was moderated by the full and clear consciousness of the artist. It is partly this that makes *Absalom And Achitophel* so weighty and impressive a satire, and that makes Dryden seem so superior to his victims. His superiority over his victims is increased by Dryden's recognition of the magisterial impartiality and integrity of Shaftesbury who is the principal target of Dryden's denunciation. Satire gains a sharper edge when it includes a tribute to whatever merit or excellence the victim may be found to possess. In Dryden, as in Juvenal and some others, the savageness of attack is accompanied by traces of the satirist's private qualities—his wisdom, fancy and homeliness. The goodness of the satirist's nature shows itself when he is angry even. Consequently we take sides with the satirist, and do not pity the victims too much.

The style of *Absalom And Achitophel* is essentially heroic. Dryden defined the heroic style as that in which "the plot, the characters, the wit, the passions, the descriptions, are all exalted above the level of common converse, as high as the imagination of the poet can carry them". Such a style is appropriate both to biblical allegory and to a narrative of great political events. Dryden treated the biblical story in an epic manner. The verse of *Absalom and Achitophel* is marked by what Dryden, elsewhere called "the smoothness, the numbers, and the turn of heroic poetry". We find

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dignified verse which rises, as occasion offers, to that 'long majestic march and energy divine' for which Pope admired Dryden. Dryden chose his words as much for their music as their meaning. "Sounding words" is a frequent phrase in his critical writings. He was helped in this by his long practice in the writing of dramas. The result was a heroic idiom of remarkable brilliance :

> Or that his conscious destiny made way
> By manly beauty to imperial sway. (*Lines 21-22*)

The elevation of the style is most evident when a speech is to be introduced :

> Him he attempts with studied arts to please
> And sheds his venom in such words as these
> (*Lines 228-29*)

Once or twice, as in the Miltonic description of the Temptation, the unusual arrangement of the words marks the style as heroic :

> Him staggering so when Hell's dire agent found,
> While fainting virtue scarce maintained her ground,
> He pours fresh forces in, and thus replies. (*Lines 373-75*)

Of course, the style of the whole poem is not uniformly elevated. When such characters as Corah and Shimei are described, the style is necessarily lowered.

The five speeches in this poem are comparable, as regard their style, with those in classical epic poetry and in Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*. These speeches are brilliant as examples of forensic oratory. Achitephel's first speech to Absalom is a fair specimen. Beginning with flattery it passes to a cunning offer of the throne to the young Absalom :

> Heaven has to all allotted, soon or late
> Some lucky revolution of their fate. (*Lines 250 ff*)

Even more brilliant is the speech, marked by a magnificent hypocrisy, made by Absalom to the crowd. This speech is reminiscent of Antony's speech to the Roman mob in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. The style is simple and direct ; yet each line is "as effective as a blacksmith's blow on softened steel".

Absalom And Achitophel has an epic quality not only as regards its style, but also in the matter and scale of the action. It is epical, too, in much of its characterisation—in the flattering descriptions of the King's friends, where the qualities of loyalty and service are exemplified in ideal terms, and also in the portraits of Achitophel and Absalom. Tory pamphleteers had alredy described Shaftesbury as the chief advocate for hell, as old Machiavelli, and as Mephistopheles. Dryden lifts this abusive commonplace to a heroic (and

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ironic) level by emphasising Achitophel's virtues and ability. This effect is also achieved by drawing in parallels to Milton's "arch-Angel ruined"—in the long, exquisitely seductive speeches, the allusions to Lucifer in the address to the reader (Lines 66-73), the Miltonic parody (Lines 373-5). The character of Absalom is more simpy heightened ; it owes much to the tradition of the heroic play, in which the struggle of duty and ambition, honour and passion, is the central theme.

In the writing of *Absalom and Achitophel,* what is perhaps most remarkable is the way in which Dryden used the allegory. The biblical allegory helped Dryden to raise his poem to a dignified level without falling into the bathos. But this was not the only advantage of employing the allegory. The allegory also acted as the instrument of Dryden's brilliant wit. Furthermore, it helped to give the poem an air of objectivity. The peculiar quality of the poem, however, lies in the wit which pervades it—from the ironic opening picture of Charles II's harem, through the representation of Achitophel as the Devil's advocate, to the other portraits of the King's enemies. Dryden's wit is explicitly and brilliantly satirical in his portrayal of Zimri (the Duke of Buckingham), Shimei (Slingsby Bethel) and Corah (Titus Oates). To such portraits, touched with every satirical device, the poem owes its fame. *Absalom And Achitophel* was deliberately written, as every line proclaims, to please the King. The King was known for his quickness in repartee and his fondness for broad allusions. It was because Charles was a witty man that Dryden was free to use for his poem a new alloy, skilful blending of heroic eulogy, satire, discourse, and witty commentary. It is the brilliant wit of the poem that has acted as its supreme preservative.

The brilliance of Dryden's wit may be illustrated with a few examples. In his portrait of Achitophel, Dryden refers to Achitophel's son as "that unfeathered, two legged thing, born a shapeless lump, like anarchy". And he tells us that this son was conceived by Achitophel's wife at a moment when Achitophel's mind "did huddled notions try". There is a touch of coarseness here, but we are certainly amused by Dryden's witty attack. In his portrait of Shimei, we get a series of statements in each of which the second part comes as an anti-climax to the first part. Thus, Shimei showed much zeal towards God *but a lot of hatred towards his king.* He never broke the Sabbath, *but for gain.* He never uttered an oath or a curse *unless it was against the government.* He accumulated wealth by the most convenient way, *which was to cheat and pray.* In his hand he held the rod of justice, *but his neck was loaded with a chain of gold.* In all these cases, the italicized phrases or sentences come like an anti-climax, and in each case we feel greatly amused by Dryden's wit. Dryden also makes a witty reference to Shimei's cooks who had forgotten their skill because of long disuse. Dryden's wit is seen also in his bitter attack on Corah, especially in the lines

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where the author ironically links Corah's physical features to certain temperamental traits. But the most conspicuous example of Dryden's wit is to be found in his portrait of Zimri. Zimri, we are told, frequently changed his hobbies and pursuits. Like a madman, he tried to employ every hour of his life with something new to enjoy. He recklessly squandered his wealth. Both in praising people and condemning them, Zimri went to the extremes. Zimri is, of course, depicted more as a fool than as a knave. But we here get one of the masterpieces of witty portrayal.

The importance attached by Renaissance critics to the moral of a heroic poem helps further to explain the relationship between *Absalom And Achitophel* and epic (or heroic) verse. An epic did not tell a story for its own sake ; it was essentially a patriotic and didactic composition. "The epic poem is a discourse invented by art to form the manners, by such instructions as are disguised under the allegories of some one important action, which is related in verse, after a probable, diverting and surprising manner. This description fits *Absalom And Achitophel* very well.

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